# Fadi AlSafadi – Senior Director, Surgical Franchise & Cluster Manager Middle East and Africa, Alcon



***We aim for the latest advancements in eye care to be accessible to every patient,***

13.03.2025

Tags: Saudi Arabia, MEA, Alcon, Ophthalmology, Access, Technology, Strategy

*Alcon’s Fadi AlSafadi shares his insights on the evolving eye care landscape in the dynamic Middle East and Africa region. He discusses Alcon’s innovative initiatives, including advancements in digitalisation, sustainability efforts, and their approach to enhancing accessibility and education. AlSafadi also highlights Alcon's commitment to improving healthcare outcomes, fostering local talent, and driving the future of eye care through strategic partnerships and technological innovations.*

**Could you provide a brief overview of your career, particularly your recent transition to the broader role of overseeing the surgical business across the Middle East and Africa for Alcon?**

After completing my Master’s degree in Medical Molecular Biology and Genetic Engineering in London, I joined Smith & Nephew, where I worked for almost 13 years. During my time there, I held various positions in sales, marketing, operations, strategy, and business development. This gave me a well-rounded experience that helped shape my career.

In 2017, I joined Alcon as the Country General Manager for Saudi Arabia, which marked the beginning of my journey in ophthalmology, a field that I have come to love. Ophthalmology is a completely different area from my previous work, but it has been incredibly fascinating and

rewarding.

After three years managing operations in Saudi Arabia, I was promoted to Surgical Franchise Head for the Middle East and Southeast Asia. This role provided me with valuable experience in navigating diverse markets and facing new challenges. Most recently, in September, I took on the role of Senior Director, Surgical Franchise and Cluster Manager Middle East and Africa, Alcon

This role is very exciting, as it covers a geographically diverse region with varying dynamics. There are three main priorities that I focus on. First is market expansion—ensuring that Alcon continues to grow and reach new markets, adding to our service coverage, which is essential for our future. Second is customer centricity—we work closely with healthcare providers and focus on offering the best possible support and service to meet their needs. Lastly, we prioritize innovation and technology, we aim for the latest advancements in eye care to be accessible to every patient, which we believe is key to the future of eye health.

**What are some of the most important trends across your region in the eye care market for Alcon today?**

There are several significant trends currently shaping the eye care market in the Middle East and Africa which not only have a major impact from an economic standpoint, but also affect human capital.

The first trend is the aging population, which is leading to an increase in age-related diseases, particularly cataracts. Cataracts are a major cause of blindness, in fact, data from the Africa Health Organization indicates that 51% of blindness(1) in the region is cataract related(2). As the population ages, improving quality of life becomes a priority, but age-related conditions, like cataracts, naturally become more common. We are also seeing a rise in cases of preventable blindness, which adds to the challenge.

Another important trend is the growing prevalence of diabetes and its associated eye diseases, such as diabetic retinopathy(3) and macular degeneration(4). In the Middle East, diabetes is widespread and nearly 20% of diabetic patients experience eye issues like diabetic retinopathy. These conditions directly affect vision clarity by damaging the retina, which is crucial for vision due to its role in containing the photoreceptors.

Additionally, dry eye disease is becoming increasingly common. One contributing factor is the significant amount of time people spend in front of screens. Studies show that we spend around

40% of our waking hours using devices like smartphones and laptops, which reduces our blink rate by 60%. Blinking is essential for refreshing the tear film on the eyes, so less frequent blinking can lead to an increase in dry eye cases. This is a global trend, but it is particularly noticeable in the Middle East, where screen use is widespread.

Lastly, technological innovation is transforming the eye care market. There is a growing demand for seamless connectivity between clinics and operating rooms (ORs). The integration of data from pre-operative assessments and patient follow-ups directly into the ORs is helping to reduce errors and improve healthcare outcomes. This level of connectivity allows for better collaboration between healthcare providers and ultimately leads to better patient care.

**Which elements of its portfolio are having the biggest impact in the region? Are there any particular innovations that Alcon introduced recently?**

One of the most impactful features of Alcon’s portfolio in the region is our advanced diagnostic technology, which is a pre-operative biometer that offers end-to-end connectivity. Once the biometer is used in the clinic, the data is transmitted to another system. This allows the diagnostic information, including lens readings, to flow directly into the operating room. Surgeons can use this data to provide patient-specific treatment based on the individual’s diagnostic information, enhancing the precision of the procedure.

Another key product is our intraocular lens, with an option that features prism-OPM (Optical Power Measurement) mitigation. Additionally, we offer a trifocal intraocular lens with more than 3 million implants worldwide that was (5) the first trifocal lens to be FDA-approved in the United States and remains one of the most widely used solutions for patients suffering from presbyopia.

We also have a system that connects the pre-operative data to the operating room, where the latest technology is used in cataract surgery that allows for lens removal through a small incision, improving recovery time. The system works with an incision of less than 1.8 millimeters, which accelerates healing and reduces post-surgical complications.

In terms of visualization, we have a system used in cataract surgeries and retinal surgeries that allows high-definition, real-time visualization of the surgery on a screen, so both the surgeon and any observing students or fellows can see exactly what the surgeon sees, making it an essential tool for both surgical precision and training. This technology is already being showcased in various training centers, allowing for an immersive experience in learning and surgery.

**What do you see as the role of Alcon in helping to build ophthalmic capacity and training in the region?**

Alcon as one of the leading companies in eye care in training and education, which is essential since eye care is our sole focus. We play a significant role in building the capacity and competency of healthcare professionals in the field of ophthalmology. In Saudi Arabia, for example, there has been considerable investment in training and education, aligning with Alcon's commitment to advancing eye care.

Alcon is equally dedicated to training and offers various programs to support this. One such initiative is our global Alcon Experience Center in Barcelona. I am proud to say that, for the first time, we will soon open an Alcon Experience Center in the Middle East and Africa. This center will combine theoretical knowledge with hands-on training on eye models, providing HCPs with a great learning experience in a controlled environment. The center will cater to fellows, residents, and experienced surgeons seeking to update their skills with the latest technologies. This center will play a pioneering role in supporting eye care education in the region.

Moreover, I would like to mention the Phaco Development Program launched by Alcon in 2008. This program aims to address cataract-related vision impairment by enhancing the expertise of healthcare professionals through specialized cataract surgery courses. We have trained more than 6,000 surgeons who have performed over 10 million surgeries benefitting over 5 million patients. In 2023, we successfully expanded this initiative to South Africa and neighboring countries, including Kenya and Zambia. In collaboration with Orbis International, a non-profit organization, we have trained approximately 65 eye care professionals in Africa since last year. Our ambition is to train 480 professionals in Africa by 2029. The program offers a variety of courses, from beginner to advanced levels, ensuring hands-on experience throughout.

**With significant changes occurring in the structuring of healthcare systems to introduce more advanced treatment solutions, what innovative strategies is Alcon pursuing to address vision impairment in the region?**

Alcon has already started addressing the changes in healthcare systems and the increasing demand for advanced treatment solutions. One of the key trends we are focusing on is improving the effectiveness of primary care in Saudi Arabia, especially with the privatization and new

healthcare structure. We are exploring ways to collaborate with primary care providers to begin cataract diagnostics at an earlier stage. By identifying cataracts early, we can often treat them before they progress, potentially reducing complications during surgery and improving outcomes. We are currently piloting this approach in some primary care centers, aiming to unlock the potential for diagnosing the large number of undiagnosed cataract cases in the region.

In addition to early detection, we continue to focus on enhancing surgical precision and accuracy, which is crucial for improving patient outcomes by using a system that allows surgeons to move from traditional optical microscopes to a digital screen, enabling them to view different layers of the eye on a large screen. This technology not only enhances precision during surgery but also serves as an excellent educational tool for training surgeons. We have already implemented this system in several hospitals, with customers telling us it has helped to improve their surgical accuracy and patient results. We are committed to the enhancement of surgical precision and accuracy, which is paramount to improving patient outcomes. By deploying advanced technologies, we facilitate a transition from traditional optical microscopes to digital screens. The system offers surgeons the capability to view different layers of the eye on a large screen, thereby significantly enhancing surgical precision. Additionally, the system serves as an invaluable educational resource for training surgeons. The implementation of this system in several hospitals has led to significant transformative improvements in surgical accuracy and patient results.

Another innovative solution we offer is our presbyopia correction intraocular lenses. Presbyopia occurs when people typically over the age of 45 experience a loss of elasticity in the eye’s lens, making it harder to focus on near objects. Our non-diffractive lenses help patients achieve excellent far, intermediate, and near vision without the need for reading glasses. This is a leading technology that significantly improves the quality of life for patients.

**How else is Alcon contributing to this transformation, particularly in driving innovation, fostering local talent, building strategic partnerships, and advancing healthcare outcomes for Saudis?**

Alcon has been serving patients in Saudi Arabia for over 30 years and we remain committed to advancing healthcare in the country. In 2019, we established our technical scientific office to support healthcare professionals and distributors, marking our first legal footprint in Saudi Arabia. In 2024, we expanded by opening our regional headquarters in Jeddah, which serves the Middle East and Africa. This regional hub will provide strategic support and help guide decisions for our

operations in eye care, spanning surgical, ocular health, and contact lenses. Our presence in the region allows us to take a holistic approach to eye care and we are committed to supporting the country's ongoing transformation, especially in alignment with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

In addition to our operational expansion, we are fostering strategic partnerships that support the country's vision. We have formed an educational partnership with the Saudi Society of Optometry to help train young optometrists. This annual collaboration provides end-to-end support for the organization and aims to teach new generations about vision correction. We are also partnering with key hospitals, to support wet labs and educational initiatives for surgical professionals.

Alcon's mission is to help people see brilliantly and we understand that achieving this requires a world-class workforce. We are dedicated to fostering local talent in Saudi Arabia, particularly by investing in training and educational workshops. We aim to build a robust pipeline of well-educated professionals, whether from the perspective of customer education or from our local field force team.

**As one of the largest players in the field, what role does Alcon play in raising awareness and encouraging individuals to take a more proactive approach to eye care, especially considering that eye health is often not perceived as an immediate concern, despite its long-term impact?**

Raising awareness about eye care is a critical focus for Alcon and we approach it through what we call the "patient journey." This is key to increasing awareness, especially since many people do not see eye health as an immediate concern, despite its long-term impact. Cataract patients, for example, are often older, typically above 60 years, and may not be avid users of social media platforms. However, we recognize that their family members play a vital role in supporting them by staying informed about the latest technologies and treatment options.

To address this, we collaborate with our distributors who are on the front lines of patient care, to provide educational materials in clinics. We also use innovative tools like the[(6)] Smart Educator, which helps patients visualize the impact of different lenses. By showing patients how they will see with and without certain lenses, such as when driving or in different lighting conditions, we help them make more informed decisions based on their lifestyle. For example, a patient who drives often may have different needs than one who is more detail oriented. This personalized approach is an essential part of raising awareness and encouraging patients to take proactive steps toward improving their eye health.

As part of the patient journey, we are working on additional initiatives that are currently in the approval stage. These initiatives will further our commitment to social impact and improving diagnostics. As one of the leading companies in eye care , Alcon takes its responsibility seriously and increasing awareness about the importance of eye health is a significant part of that. Ultimately, the patient’s choice and the surgeon’s guidance will be the determining factors in selecting the best treatment, but our role is to provide the necessary tools and education to empower patients to make informed decisions.

**Alcon has highlighted digital transformation as a key enabler in its strategy. Why is this topic so important to the company and what solutions have been created thus far?**

Digital transformation is certainly a central focus for Alcon. It is key to improving patient care and enhancing the overall efficiency of our operations. This shift towards digital is similar to the connectivity we experience in our daily lives, where devices like laptops, mobile phones, and even cars are seamlessly connected. Alcon is bringing this level of connectivity into healthcare, and we believe it plays a crucial role in enhancing patient outcomes.

One of the most important aspects of digital transformation is moving towards a paperless, data-driven healthcare system. This shift helps reduce human errors and is in line with the direction Saudi Arabia is taking as well, aiming for greater efficiency and accuracy in healthcare.

We also offer an Outcome Intelligence service solution, which is a cloud-based platform that connects various technological platforms together. This solution is vital for improving connectivity and enabling our customers to derive greater value from the technologies they use.

In addition to these, we are integrating artificial intelligence and augmented reality into our training programs. By using a VR 3D simulations, we can provide healthcare professionals with a highly controlled, immersive training experience. This technology allows trainees to feel as though they are in real surgical environments, improving their skills and confidence in a safe, virtual setting.

Moreover, we have the Alcon Learning Academy—a digital platform offering a wide range of courses, webinars, and learning modules. Healthcare professionals can register, subscribe, and access content tailored to their expertise. With quizzes at the end of each module, the platform is designed to be user-friendly and provides an interactive learning experience. This helps ensure that eye care professionals are well-equipped with the latest knowledge and skills to improve

patient care.

**Based on the innovations you mentioned, what has been your experience in bringing these innovations to a market like Saudi Arabia, especially considering the impressive progress the country has made in achieving Level 4 maturity from the WHO?**

We truly believe Saudi is a leader when it comes to adopting innovation and the country's openness to new technologies makes it the ideal place for this product's introduction. Alcon has a rich pipeline of innovation, with many of these products planned for commercial availability in Saudi Arabia pending regulatory approval. For example, we are excited about our next-generation combined vitreoretinal-cataract system, new intraocular lens material, and more. Consistent with our purpose of helping people to see brilliantly, we are committed to bring new technologies to Saudi Arabia eye care professionals and their patients.

Saudi Arabia regulatory bodies, including the Saudi FDA, have communicated clear regulatory pathways to help companies like Alcon understand how best to deliver innovation to the Saudi market. I also want to highlight the country's high regulatory standards, which ensure that new technologies are properly evaluated and accessible. As the healthcare system evolves, particularly with the recent introduction of healthcare clusters, I believe accessibility to advanced treatments will only improve. The clustering structure will help reduce waiting lists and streamline the patient pathway, making access to care quicker and more efficient.

Currently, there are five clusters, and we anticipate that this system will follow the model used in Europe and the UK, where primary care plays a key role in diagnostics. This early detection approach will ensure patients are referred to the right specialists for appropriate treatment before issues become more severe. With this new approach, more patients will receive timely care and benefit from the latest technologies.

At Alcon, we always aim to adapt our processes to fit local needs and norms. We understand the ongoing evolution of the healthcare system in Saudi Arabia, and we are committed to providing solutions that meet both current and future needs. While some initiatives are still in the early stages, we are confident that we will be strong partners in the country's healthcare transformation and that our solutions will continue to support the improvement of healthcare outcomes as the system evolves.

**Alcon has shown a commitment to reducing its environmental impact, with initiatives like cutting down single-use plastics in eye drop packaging. How are Alcon's ESG commitments across the region going to have a real impact on operations and its stakeholders?**

Alcon's commitment to ESG initiatives is global, but it will certainly have a significant impact in the region, including Saudi Arabia. The country is increasingly focused on sustainability, and we are aligning our efforts with that progress. One of our key initiatives is reducing single-use plastics in our eye drop packaging. This effort will make a substantial difference in minimizing waste and improving disposal practices in the market.

Additionally, Alcon is working towards becoming carbon neutral by 2030—aligning with global sustainability goals. This includes reducing Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions and implementing energy-efficient practices at our manufacturing sites. By 2030, we also aim to eliminate 100% of non-hazardous waste from landfills at our manufacturing sites and distribution centers. This focus on waste management and sustainability will have a long-term positive effect on the region as well.

As for social impact, Alcon's goal is to improve the vision of five million people by 2025, focusing on providing training and treating untreated cataracts in low- to medium-income countries. This includes helping around one million people suffering from cataract-related blindness, which is a significant contribution to improving global eye care. Additionally, our two charitable foundations — Alcon Cares and the Alcon Foundation — provide product, equipment and monetary donations to our charitable partners to help increase access to quality eye care around the world.

On top of that, we regularly engage in social impact activities through Alcon in Action, our Alcon volunteering day that brings together our associates to make a positive impact in the communities where they live and work. These activities take place annually, with some initiatives happening in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, we strive to provide an equal opportunity workplace. Alcon has been recognized as a "Great Place to Work" in 2023 and 2024 and has also been awarded "Best Workplace for Saudi Nationals" in 2025 as well Best Place to Work Pharmaceuticals, Health Care and Biotech on GCC level These awards reflect our commitment to fostering a positive, inclusive work environment where employees thrive.

**What makes Alcon the partner of choice for eyecare in the region and is there any final message you would like to leave with our audience as we conclude this interview?**

Alcon’s mission is to help people see brilliantly. This is a powerful and meaningful goal and it drives everything we do. We are not only focused on advancing the science of eye care, but also on improving accessibility, driving sustainability, and making a meaningful impact on the communities we serve. These efforts are built on our market-leading expertise in eye care and our long-standing, strong relationships with healthcare providers.

As a key partner to governments, organizations, and healthcare providers, we are always focused on addressing the growing needs of the region’s diverse population. We do this by providing innovative solutions that meet these needs and by empowering both local and global talents. Our strategy emphasizes fostering strategic collaborations to deliver the best possible care.

Ultimately, we believe that by working together, we are building the future of eye care.

## References


1: Blindness and vision impairment factsheet | Africa Health Organization

2: WHO EMRO | Cataract | Health topics

3: Diabetic Retinopathy – Middle East/North Africa – American Academy of Ophthalmology

4: Eye Disease – IDF Europe Site

5: IOL Market Scope Report of 2024 (REF – 24516) Page number 11

6: Alcon Vision Educator


© 2025Alcon Inc.03/25. ME13-SG-2500002

**See more interviews**