

Melvin D'Souza - Corporate Vice President & General Manager Saudi Arabia, Novo Nordisk



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Melvin D'Souza, Corporate Vice President & General Manager at Novo Nordisk, provides valuable insights into the company's growth trajectory, strategy, and the evolving healthcare landscape in Saudi Arabia. D'Souza discusses Novo Nordisk's role in addressing the growing prevalence of diabetes and obesity and the company's efforts to integrate into Saudi Arabia's healthcare system in the face of transformation under Vision 2030. He also shares reflections from his 30-year personal journey within the company and Novo Nordisk's ongoing commitment to improving patient care.

Novo Nordisk experienced 25 percent of global growth in the past year. How has this growth impacted your operations in Saudi Arabia, and what transformational initiatives are you currently pursuing to keep pace with the company's overall trajectory?

We are proud to be the second largest and one of the fastest-growing multinational pharma companies in Saudi Arabia, reaching nearly one million patients with diabetes and obesity last year, with a goal to triple that number by 2030.

Our strategy focuses on innovation, urgently delivering solutions, and collaborating with stakeholders for long-term impact. A key initiative is our announcement of insulin local manufacturing, which ensures sustainable access to innovative medications through partnerships

with NUPCO, the SFDA, and the Ministry of Health. This milestone demonstrates our commitment to aligning with the Kingdom's Vision 2030 for healthcare transformation and improving the lives of those living with diabetes.

Can you elaborate on your localisation strategy in Saudi Arabia? Beyond your collaboration with the government, how does this strategy enhance Novo Nordisk's presence within Saudi Arabia and the broader region?

Our localisation strategy in Saudi Arabia is built around three pillars of growth.

The first is to enhance product availability and improve access to healthcare for our patients. Second is bringing innovation, knowledge transfer and establishing leadership. Our goal is to drive meaningful changes in the segments we operate in. The third pillar focuses on ensuring sustainability, which includes aligning fully with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

We are committed to working closely with the government and other entities to unlock opportunities and build stronger partnerships, while supporting the country's development goals.

In a previous interview, you mentioned that Novo Nordisk has been outpacing market growth. The Saudi market grew by nine percent last year, while Novo Nordisk's growth has been in double digits for the past few years. What have been the key drivers of this growth in the Saudi market?

Saudi Arabia's impressive nine percent market growth provides a significant opportunity, and I am proud that Novo Nordisk has achieved double-digit growth in recent years, particularly in diabetes and obesity, addressing two of the biggest chronic diseases in the region. Globally, we have reached more than 45 million people with our life-changing medicines.

In Saudi Arabia, obesity affects nearly half of adults, while one in six suffers from diabetes, presenting us with the chance to impact nearly every household. We view Saudi Arabia as both a growth opportunity and a shared responsibility. Trusting partnerships with stakeholders and patients are essential as we strive to deliver innovations and programs that meaningfully improve lives.

What factors contribute to Saudi Arabia being a successful market for Novo Nordisk in bringing diabetes solutions to the population?

Our success in Saudi Arabia's diabetes market comes from a comprehensive approach that goes beyond just providing products. We offer long-term solutions for diabetes and obesity, which can enhance life expectancy through lifestyle changes, medication, and ongoing support.

Our strategy includes building healthcare capacity through clinical trials and doctor training, enabling us to address the evolving needs of patients with our extensive portfolio.

We are also dedicated to raising awareness and ensuring early diagnosis since diabetes and obesity are prevalent. By improving awareness and resources, we aim to enhance patient outcomes and integrate our products into a holistic solution.

Sustainable growth in Saudi Arabia requires continuous effort to meet patients' needs throughout their journey.

Does Saudi Arabia have a national health plan specifically focused on diabetes, given its high prevalence, or is this still an area that needs further development? What role does Novo Nordisk play in helping assess the burden of the disease and identify areas for improvement?

Saudi Arabia is focused on addressing diabetes due to its high prevalence, and we are collaborating with the government to assess its burden and gather data on prevalence. Established registries advance our efforts, along with a robust reimbursement program that supports treatment access.

We work to offer products at suitable price points and continue partnering with government bodies like the Saudi Health Council to improve diabetes care and patient outcomes, which is vital for tackling the country's growing diabetes burden.

Saudi Arabia is part of Novo Nordisk's clinical development network. Given that clinical trials have not historically been a focus in the Kingdom, what has your experience been in integrating Saudi Arabia into the global clinical trial landscape?

We recognise the importance of selecting appropriate clinical trials for the Saudi market, prioritising areas like obesity— a chronic disease reaching pandemic proportions—and rare

diseases that require specialised research. Saudi Arabia is crucial to our global trial pool due to its high obesity rates and economic implications.

We will establish strong representations in specialized areas, enabling effective integration of Saudi Arabia into the global clinical trial landscape. With our local resources and expertise, we are well-equipped to conduct these trials successfully.

How do you assess the level of patient readiness in Saudi Arabia for participating in clinical trials, considering that patient recruitment can often be a challenge for trials?

Patients in Saudi Arabia are generally very receptive to participating in clinical trials, showing high demand for new innovations in areas like chronic treatments and rare diseases. The quicker these innovations are introduced, the sooner patients can access new therapies.

The Saudi FDA has established an ecosystem that supports the early launch of products, especially when backed by robust clinical trial programs. This favourable environment enhances both clinical development and patient access, encouraging companies to invest in trials in the Kingdom.

Only a few years ago, there was significant debate about obesity being recognised as a disease rather than just a lifestyle challenge. How has this conversation evolved, and what changes have you observed in the recognition of obesity as a disease?

The conversation around obesity has evolved positively, with the healthcare community largely recognising it as a disease rather than just a lifestyle challenge. Over the past few years, we have built confidence in getting this recognition through our educational initiatives and obesity treatments.

As awareness continues to grow, we are prepared to provide solutions that support patients and healthcare systems. Obesity is linked to over 200 health complications, serving as a 'gateway' to conditions like type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, which can significantly impact life expectancy and quality of life.

When it comes to prescribing and reimbursement, are there any variations based on the patient's profile, and does this differ depending on whether they are in the public or

private healthcare systems?

Reimbursement for obesity treatments varies significantly between public and private healthcare systems. In the private sector, these treatments are typically not reimbursed, leading patients to pay out of pocket. Conversely, in some public institutions, obesity treatments are often covered.

While discussions continue regarding the formal recognition of obesity as a disease and subsequent reimbursement, progress is being made. The World Health Organisation recognises obesity as a serious, progressive, chronic disease affecting one in seven people globally and projected to impact nearly two billion in the next decade.

With the ongoing healthcare transformation under Vision 2030, how do you foresee the dynamics between the public and private healthcare systems, regulators, and industry evolving in Saudi Arabia?

Saudi Arabia's healthcare transformation under Vision 2030 is significant and requires us to adapt our strategies to align with these changes. For multinationals like Novo Nordisk, localisation involves integrating into broader governmental and regulatory processes.

This transformation presents opportunities for collaboration and engagement with various stakeholders. Each company will navigate this differently, but successful integration will depend on a collaborative mindset and strong partnerships with the government and other entities to drive progress together.

Looking ahead to 2025, what are the key actions or milestones that you need to execute this year to ensure success?

In 2025, our key actions include establishing a strong footprint for new product introductions and expanding our team to enhance capabilities. Localisation requires specific expertise, so investing in acquiring and nurturing this talent is crucial. Focused on launches, localisation, and partnerships, these pillars will drive our continued success.

What message would you like to share with the local Saudi healthcare community on behalf of Novo Nordisk?

I have two key messages. First, Novo Nordisk's century-long journey is rooted in continuous innovation and a commitment to improving health outcomes. Second, we are dedicated to a transformational journey along with the Vision 2030 of Saudi Arabia.

It's crucial that we focus on collaboration rather than individual achievements. By working together, we can change the narrative around chronic diseases like obesity and diabetes, making meaningful progress in managing this condition, and shaping the future of care both locally and globally.

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