Huzur Devletsah – General Manager Gulf and Near East, Lilly, UAE



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Huzur Devletsah, General Manager of the Gulf and Near East regions of Lilly, talks about the political instability in other parts of the region, the lack of an adequate talent pool in the industry, and what this all means for the future growth of Lilly.

With the inauguration of your Middle East-Africa regional office in Dubai earlier this year, it is evident that Lilly is investing heavily in this region. As the manager for the Gulf region, tell us about your strategy for this area.

Over the last 2-3 years Lilly has invested more than US$15 million in the Gulf region and specifically in the diabetes field. This investment reflects the business opportunity that we see in the diabetes market and the tremendous contributions that Lilly can bring to improve the lives of people living with diabetes in the region.

We also believe that the region is attractive for its strong economic and political stability, its ability to attract foreign investments, and the continuous support of the health authorities. While our focus is currently on Diabetes, we are aware that there is also a need to address the life style related diseases like obesity and hypertension that are also growing in the region , as it is the case in many countries across the world.

We are aware of the importance of human capital. We work to develop our people in a way to empower them to address the challenging and growing business needs across the Near East and Gulf Region.

How do you attract such talent given the scarcity of skilled people with experience in the pharmaceutical industry?

Traditionally this has definitely been a challenge for the pharmaceutical industry in the Middle East, but lately we have been noticing a shift in this trend. The new generations of work seekers know a lot about the pharmaceutical industry and are interested to be part of organizations which ultimate objective is to serve people and patients. The slow market growth in several European countries and the employment-related problems have encouraged many talented and experienced people to look at opportunities in the Middle East Region.

Our strategic approach to tackle this specific problem has been to work closely with local and international business schools to attract MBA graduates who are interested to work and live in the Middle East Region.

The mid-term goal is to develop these young talents into senior leadership positions through fast-track career programs. We are also convinced that there is a need to have a diversified workforce in the long-term that includes expatriates and gulf nationals as well.

At all levels of our recruitment activities we concentrate on Lilly’s attachment to its internal values of respect, integrity and excellence, the important career development opportunities and the promising and important pipeline we have.

Those elements have proven to be important motivators to join our company.

It seems like you have unlocked the key to talent challenges in the Gulf. If this is not a hurdle for Lilly then what would you say is your greatest obstacle at the moment?

One of the main challenges in the Gulf region continues to be the political instability of neighboring countries that inevitably affects the entire area. Certainly, countries like the UAE are politically stable, but other countries have been deeply affected by the Syrian conflict, for example.

The other great challenge is the lack of harmonization of regulatory systems and policies across the region, which makes it very difficult to operate even though geographically the Gulf area is not that large. We are encouraging GCC countries to further their collaboration in terms of health regulations so that we can move towards a model of greater centralization. This will not only make our work easier, but it will also benefit patients in that it would allow a quicker registration timeline for products and making these available much earlier. The UAE is perhaps one of the fastest adopters of innovative treatments when compared to the broader Middle East region. We have experienced this with one of our diabetes product that was registered in the UAE only 3 months after its approval by the European health authorities (The second worldwide registration after Europe).

The main reason why we chose to come to the UAE to begin exploring the Middle Eastern markets is due to this country's commitment to become a reference healthcare model for the region. What is your perception of this transformation over the last 2 years?

There is no doubt that the UAE is moving in that direction and indeed this was one of the determining reasons that has encouraged our global headquarters to choose Dubai as the location for our regional office covering 70 countries of our emerging markets organization (Turkey – the Middle East Russia and Africa). Beyond the overall favorable business environment, the UAE pharmaceutical market has been growing very strongly during the last few years, and it is predicted that it will continue to grow by an average of at least 10% for the next 5 years. From a geographical location, this country is also a regional hub when it comes to airline transportation and logistics.

More specific to the pharmaceutical and healthcare sectors, the UAE has been able to attract great private investments in the form of private clinics and hospitals that are being built at record speed. This is coupled with the commitment of the health authorities to bring innovation into the country as efficiently as possible. For such reasons, there is no doubt that the UAE will play a key role in our regional plans and investment strategy in the region, possibly even in the form of forging partnerships with local manufacturers.

It is clear that Lilly is making the right moves to assert itself in these markets, however, you are still a newcomer compared to other companies that have been here for

decades. How would you assess the brand recognition of the company thus far?

We might be latecomers to this region; however, based on the fact that our areas of expertise are diabetes, cancer and lifestyle diseases I think it is still the right moment. We have allowed ourselves some time to understand the dynamics of the market and our current investment strategy is now in line with our capabilities and knowledge of the market. This has allowed us to bring our latest innovative treatments that answer the specific patients' needs in the Region

As our diabetes expertise is in the "secondary prevention" phase (controlling diabetes and avoiding its complications), we have focused our efforts to better educate patients and physicians on how to better manage the disease. We understand that our mission is not easy and to succeed we needed to collaborate with the health authorities across the region to ensure a wide coverage and reach of the next generation diabetologists and patients as well. In a few years and through meaningful collaborations with the health authorities across the Gulf region we were able to establish positive corporate brand equity with our stakeholders. We believe that we will become the leading company in the diabetes field within the next five years, through a broad portfolio range and targeted and tailored made collaborations and education initiatives.

Additional to diabetes, Lilly is also globally recognized for its strengths in CNS disorders. What are the trends for this market segment in the Gulf region and how active is Lilly within this field?

Along with our diabetes focus and expertise, we have an important mental health portfolio and are still an important player in this market segment. We also do have several products in the pipeline that we hope will be available in the near future.

Out of the many initiatives the Lilly is implementing in the Gulf region, which one do you consider to be the most unique?

Each collaboration and initiative that we have undertaken in the Gulf region in the diabetes field is unique by itself, but I can definitely point out to you the innovative educational approach and program that Lilly has supported across the world and that has been highly solicited and endorsed by all the health authorities and partners with whom we have collaborated in the region.

The education tool is called “Diabetes Conversation Map”™. Created by Healthy Interactions, a global leader in health education, in collaboration with the International Diabetes Federation (IDF), with the support of Lilly Diabetes, the unique Diabetes Conversation Map™ education tool has been introduced in more than 120 countries, and is now available in 30 languages. It was first launched with 7 topics covering different diabetes-related topics (Living with Diabetes, How Diabetes Works, Healthy Eating and Keeping Active, Starting Insulin Treatment, Diabetes and Caring for Your Feet, Understanding the Many Factors of Managing Diabetes , Living in a Family with Type 1 Diabetes).

The tool is unique as it offers the opportunity for patients to share their personal experience by engaging in a conversation type session facilitated by a certified diabetes educator. Overall the Conversation Map education program has been very well-received in the Gulf region. More than 2000 patients have taken part in it, making it one of the most successful corporate initiatives in the region.

We even expanded the program and tailored made it to the needs of our customers. In fact, several diabetes experts and thought leaders, particularly from countries with large Muslim populations, had expressed the value of having a Conversation Map™ that would help them educate patients and their families about managing diabetes during Ramadan and the need to consult with their doctors to minimize the risks associated with this challenging period.

Our partners, Healthy Interactions and the International Diabetes Federation agreed to endorse the development of a specific map for “Managing Diabetes during Ramadan”, supported by Lilly Diabetes.

The Map was developed and finalized by May 2013 and made available in 7 languages and 17 countries among which the Middle East Region.

This is a very unique initiative that demonstrates that Lilly’s commitment and expertise are not limited to bringing innovative therapies but also the best personal solutions that can help doctors and patients achieve a better result in managing and controlling diabetes.

It seems like Lilly has all the right tools to continue succeeding in the Gulf region. What are your expectations for the company over the next 5 years?

My objective is to have the most talented, diverse and engaged workforce that is able to provide valuable answers that matter to the medical community in the region and with the highest integrity. From a corporate perspective, I expect Lilly to be a valuable partner to health authorities

across the region, fostering meaningful partnerships to advance healthcare education, healthcare policies and healthcare delivery across the region.

On a more personal note, we have encountered very few women working in the pharmaceutical industry here in the UAE. Do you find that being a woman has caused any challenge or advantage for you as a manager?

I am asked this question quite often. I believe that diversity, in all settings, brings with it many positive things. I am hopeful that we will see more and more women acceding to managerial roles in the Middle East Region and going beyond the Middle Management roles. Women can bring with them a different thinking process and different leadership styles.

So far, being a woman has never been an obstacle for me to undertake my role, to the opposite of the general perceptions and beliefs. I have always been treated with full respect and been welcomed across all the region by all our customers; the same way that It would have been in other parts of the world.

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