Interview with Zuhdi Z. Al-Jaouni, General Manager, ALI BIN ALI MEDICAL

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Tags: Ali Bin Ali Medical

Mr. Jaouni, what do you understand as the vision of the Ali Bin Ali family in betting on the medical field and establishing Ali Bin Ali Medical?

The Ali Bin Ali Group has represented Siemens Medical since the late 1970s. In 1998, the owners had a vision for a booming healthcare market in Qatar. They decided, therefore, to open the medical division.

I joined the company in July of 1998 to help bring their vision to fruition. With the owners' guidance, we developed a strategy of expansion that delineated where we wanted to be within the next ten years.

In the past, healthcare was a very small field in Qatar. With the exception of the Hammad Medical Corporation—Qatar's public hospital—there was minimal work being done in this sector, and there was little involvement from private industry. However, when Qatar started looking towards its future, the expectation was that the population would increase. Healthcare is integral in accommodating the needs of a growing society. Ali Bin Ali saw that the opportunity was there to open a new division and expand into the medical sector.

What have been the main milestones and achievements of this division since you took the reins of the organization in 1998?

At the time that I joined the company, this division had only one agency. We created a business plan based on our analysis of market demand, and from there, we started looking into unique products to introduce to the market.

We have reached a level where we do indeed have such unique products—amongst them products in robotic surgery. We have succeeded in bringing these to Hammad Hospital, and to the Qatar Science and Technology Park.

Our structure today covers every area in the health sector. We have 79 staff members—including salespeople, bioengineers, and management and administration staff. We have reached a level wherein we are even ready to run a hospital.

We have also succeeded to design, build, equip, and conduct operations in a diagnosis and research center next to Hammad Hospital such as PET/CT Cyclotron Center.

How would you evaluate the overall performance of Ali Bin Ali Medical in terms of turnover and market share?

These figures are difficult to measure. We must look at our work in different areas. In imaging, for instance—MRIs, etc.—we are market leaders, representing such companies as Siemens. If we look at other sectors, our positioning varies from year to year.
We are thankful to all new and old consumers who are still patronizing our products and services. Therefore, I must say that our clients will be the right person to measure us. I always say, moreover, that what we have achieved up to the present is just the beginning.

What is the relative importance of Ali Bin Ali Medical for the Ali Bin Ali Group—a diversified organization with eleven business streams?

Ali Bin Ali is much diversified, and the Group is successful in all areas it operates in. The Medical division is certainly important to the company’s expansion. We are looking into improving product quality, quality of services, and customer satisfaction.

Ali Bin Ali has managed to secure strong exclusive distribution agreements in Qatar—such as those with Siemens, Fresenius Kabi, and etc. Why do you believe these companies chose you over your competitors as their preferred partner?

I do not like to compare Ali Bin Ali Medical with our competitors. I believe in healthy competition; constructive competition. I am very much opposed to non-ethical competition. Therefore, I do not look to ‘beat my competitors.’ Perhaps others view the market that way. I look to provide value for

my partners.

With that said, I would note that one of our strengths is the fact that ‘Ali Bin Ali’ is a well-recognized name with a lot of history. Another factor is the feedback we have gotten from satisfied customers. Our approach toward building relationships with our partners has also proven to be quite strong.

When Focus Reports recently met with Mr. Sherif Shehata of Aamal Medical, he mentioned the importance of IT for the group. He noted that this segment represented 20% of his business. What is the importance of IT for your own enterprise?

In our field, IT is today unavoidable. It is becoming very much necessary. All equipment has to be connected and integrated. Slowly, we are going film-less in most hospitals. Chemicals and hard-copy films are phasing out. Therefore, IT is as important as anything else we do, and a significant element in our services. I should say that we are a pioneer in IT—and it is not easy to achieve integration, whether we are talking about administrators, or connecting all modalities to receive information.

One of the key assets for any company is human resources. How do you ensure that ABA is able to retain the best talent?

It is a matter of building a good working environment. We have a very friendly, comfortable atmosphere. We have a lot of trust for our employees—as long as they achieve their targets, we do not mind how they get there.

It is impossible to retain 100% of your talent. People are always looking for a better opportunity. But we try our best!

When we met with Mr. Samy Hanna of EBN SINA, he mentioned the company’s plans to expand their client base by going beyond the borders of Qatar into neighboring Gulf nations like Bahrain. Do you have ambitions to work abroad in the Gulf?

There is such a vision within the Ali Bin Ali Group, and the organization has already ventured outside of Qatar in the Luxury business. However, I feel that for the Medical business, Qatar is really booming, and it is not yet saturated. This market still needs a lot of effort on our part to meet demand. Hence, the intention to go abroad is there; but we will wait for the right time.

Where would you like to take your operations over the next 3-4 years?

We try our best to be a unique partner in Qatar. Wherever we find opportunities to expand, we are ready to seize them.

What is your final message to the international readers of Pharmaceutical Executive?

We are happy to work with all various international manufacturers and suppliers. And we are happy to work with them on a higher level—because Qatar is today focusing not only on diagnosis and treatment, but also on research. At ABA, research is too part of our operation. If there is any opportunity for collaboration with multinational players, we would be more than happy to assist.

To our local partners, I would like to say that we are very open, and very transparent, and our door is always open. We would like to maintain healthy competition, as well as a focus on market demands.

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