

Interview with Mohammad Abbadi, MSD Jordan, Country Lead Jordan

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What have been the key milestones and accomplishments in the company development since you took the helm almost four years ago?

First of all, and for me personally, moving from a support function into operations management was itself a big change and real challenge. Being closer to your customers, patients and doctors is an exciting and inspiring thing. In MSD, as one of the global leading healthcare companies, all what we do, is geared towards improving the patients' quality of life and being well.

MSD in Jordan is meant to be an entity that works beyond promoting its products and achieving commercial benefits, working with various stakeholders contributing to the improvement of healthcare provided to the Jordanian patients. This is achieved through different means; we actively work on the continuous medical education of healthcare professionals, doctors, pharmacists and other stakeholders. We do this through a team of dedicated professional medical representatives and medical doctors, we keep the medical community updated with latest scientific information about the innovative products we have and the latest studies in the related therapeutically areas. In other words, as a representative of a scientific company, we are promoting science. This is an ongoing contribution to the country.

The other function of MSD is to coordinate through its local distribution partners, being the gateway of new innovative medicine entering the Jordanian market so doctors and ultimately patients will have access to these innovative products the earliest possible. All our efforts globally and in Jordan are allocated behind developing products that helps improving patients lives, meeting un-met need. We try to make out products accessible by all means by raising awareness, educating doctors and having these products available with reasonable affordable prices.

In addition to above, we are keen to operate as good citizens. All our activities in Jordan contribute positively to the economy and business environment. We conduct several scientific activities and on regular basis, inviting international professors and top scientific leaders to share their knowledge and experience with Jordanian physicians, these activities contributes to growth of Jordan as medical hub and benefits different sectors in their business, i.e hotels, restaurants, transportation and others.

With a six million population, what is the relative importance of Jordan for MSD in the all MENA region?

The importance of Jordan does not come from its size. It is a small country but it is now becoming one of the most important medical tourism hubs in the region. This is mainly driven by several factors:

First of all, the relative security and stability of the country. When you look around, and especially in the last couple of years and after the Arab spring, Jordan is relatively a safe haven.

Further, the quality of professional healthcare treatment provided in Jordan whether looking at advanced equipment in hospitals, the experience of HCP or the availability of innovative products all extended in relatively lower cost comparing with other international alternatives

All of the above, coupled with Jordan's convenient location, drives the country to be one of the most important markets to all healthcare providers

The market has been growing 10 % annually and this growth is expected to continue until 2016.

How are you positioning MSD to optimally capture the opportunities?

We believe that Jordan is and will continue to be an opportunity market, we are committed to the people and patients in Jordan and we will continue to contribute to the success and growth of the sector. Generally speaking, if we are to talk about the opportunities in Jordan, pharmaceutical industry was one of the few that grew in 2011. After the financial crisis that started in 2008 and 2009, a lot of industries suffered. Pharmaceutical sector is one the very few which maintained positive growth. We were talking about 20 % growth in 2011. Most of the growth came from

branded pharmaceutical products mainly by the multinational companies. We are an important player and we have our strong reasons as to why we are in that position. We anticipate this growth to continue.

In addition to the various reasons that we have talked about, Jordan is also considered as the one of the most advanced countries when it comes to regulatory affairs whether we are talking about pharmacovigilance, registration, pricing and all other related aspects. Jordan is a reference for several surrounding countries. They look at what the Jordanian FDA is doing and are trying to implement. This has its own pros and cons but in general, we see that as a positive thing and accordingly, we are working closely with JFDA in continuous efforts for better shaping this environment. Still we are having challenges and working together with authorities in improving them but we cannot eliminate the fact that we have achieved milestones.

One area that I would like to comment is related to the government support of the multinational companies and the industry. Without eliminating the fact that Jordan has done a lot of efforts to improve the system, there is an area which still requires reasonable improvement, especially when it comes to IP laws, data protection and exclusivity. This is an area that we have concerns as multinationals. Another area is the balance between strong manufacturing industry and a second exporting segment which we support and would like get fair treatment when it comes to tender business. We are working closely with the government to overcome these issues. The last thing I would like to mention is representation of the multinationals in the higher council. We are not there yet and we are working closely with the government, trying to convince all the stakeholders that it is crucial for us to be there.

MSD is present here with its full portfolio and we see a push in diabetes. Could you outline your focus areas?

When it comes to product portfolio availability in Jordan, I would like to highlight here that in Jordan, we are called secondary registration market; which means that we need to wait at least 1 year for pharmacovigilance for any products that has been registered in the US or EU. We need to wait a year but compared to the other countries, we are quite advanced and our products are relatively quick in the Jordanian market comparing with other parts of the world. We are one of the first countries to introduce the products as long as the products are registered first in the US and EU. Almost our entire portfolio is available in the Jordanian market.

Jordan has a very strong local pharma industry. There are very strong players and now these are moving to specialty areas such as oncology. How do you position MSD to be the best in this

competitive environment?

Being in a competitive environment is healthy. If you compare Jordan with any of the surrounding countries in the Middle East, you will find that strong local companies are working in generics or branded generics. Now they are even approaching to work in bio-similar in some advanced specialty products. Local manufacturing is very strong. The leading companies in the combined market are locals, which is not the norm in the surrounding countries. This is good for the country. Secondly, generics present a full-fledged market. On top of that, I cannot recall any international company that does not exist in Jordan. Everybody is competing in a geographical area of 67 thousand kilometres with a 6 million population. This is a big challenge by itself.

The majority of Jordanian citizens are covered by national insurance in governmental hospitals, and that sector is dominated by generics.

The private sector is left with almost 20% of the market and is growing mainly due medical tourism. This is where the competition is for multinationals. MSD strives to be among the top 5 multinationals. Currently, we rank 9th in the total market and 5th among the multinationals in terms of the size of the business. Definitely diversity of the brands and the therapeutic areas in which we are competing plays a significant role. Our vision is to be in the top 3 by the year 2014, reflecting our international position, through a strong pipeline with which we are ahead of most of the internationals.

Mr. Kakish from Aventis told us that Jordan is a center of excellence for clinical trials and indeed a lot is happening in this regard. Is MSD conducting clinical trials in Jordan?

Yes we do. We are among the leaders when it comes to research and development. We conduct pre-research activities through which we are contributing to the global corporate research with phase II or III studies before the product is approved. We are participating in those efforts and in different therapeutic areas. We are also doing post marketing research. There are two or three important factors here that encourage companies to consider Jordan for their research activities; First of all, the laws and regulations of the healthcare authorities facilitate and support the research activities. Second, it is relatively less costly to conduct such research comparing with other countries. And finally, recruitment rate is higher. We have conducted research on different molecules and different stages of various product I,e Diabetes and Osteoporosis.

In diabetes, we have conducted the so-called Ramadan study, in which we participated along with other countries in the region. Diabetes prevalence is very high in Jordan, especially in type 2, and we wanted to tackle this disease during the fasting month of Ramadan. When people are fasting, it

becomes more challenging to control the ups and downs of diabetes. If you take one pill in the evening, the efficacy will continue throughout the fasting period and patient will have continued benefit despite fasting.

Competition for human resources in Jordan is quite intense. How do you attract and retain the best talents?

Generally speaking, One of Jordan's top assets is its people. The country is developing and exporting these people to the surrounding countries, educational system is of high quality, and the country's pharmaceutical faculties deliver a steady pool of well-educated graduates accordingly.

MSD is very structured worldwide and in Jordan and implements a structured process in attracting, developing and retaining talents. We believe that human beings are the biggest asset that we have in the company. We are very careful in selecting people with the right values and motives. We make a lot of efforts in investing in the development of these people, training and giving them the opportunity to get exposure as we are a multinational company.

Looking at the future, where would you like to take MSD in the next 3 years?

It is a fact that there will be more need for healthcare and medical services in the future. As much as 37% of the population in Jordan is below the age of 15. The number of people above the age of 65 increased from 3 to 3,5 percent from 1997 to 2008. This is a trend; the aging population will need more medical attention. Besides the population growth, medical tourism will also increase. All these indications contribute to the growth of the pharmaceutical and healthcare industries. This comes with the improvement in different domains such as infrastructure, clinics, hospitals and medicines, and in such conditions MSD has all the opportunities to continue to thrive. We have all the elements needed: the knowledge, the products, and the vision. Our vision is to grow faster than the market. We rank fifth today, and we want to be the second or third.

That will be achieved by always be close to our customers. We will keep working to fulfil their needs by providing the right medicine and service. We are partnering, not selling and we believe this strategy will pay back if bundled with a variety of therapeutic areas and our strong pipeline.

What is your final message to the readers of Pharmaceutical Executive about MSD commitment to Jordan?

Be closer to our people. Be closer to our patients, understand their needs and improve their quality of life.

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