Interview with Khaled Yousef Alderbesti, Director, Qatar Investment Promotion Department (IPD)

10.06.2012

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Mr. Alderbesti, can you please begin by giving our readers an overview of the core agenda of the Investment Promotion Department of the Qatari Ministry of Trade and Industry since you took the reins of the organization, and the role of healthcare and life sciences in your activities?

I will begin with a discussion of the Department as whole. Our division of the Ministry was established five years ago; at the time, most investment in Qatar was directed toward the oil and gas industry. The government believed that an institution was needed to oversee foreign investment in other sectors, in order to diversify away from natural resources.

We began to focus on sectors like manufacturing, business services, education, and healthcare. Especially in healthcare and education, we saw great demand for foreign investment. It was more than a question of satisfying outside interest to invest in these sectors—it was a question of satisfying the needs of Qatari society.

Healthcare was always at the top of our agenda in terms of FDI. Again, not for the sake of capital, but for the sake of bringing technology, and introducing foreign institutions that could stimulate and enhance healthcare for Qataris. We saw that the Qatari people needed this.
Our core agenda it today more proactive. We want to fine-tune and accelerate research; we want to identify strong multinational companies that can help stimulate development. We try to approach such companies, and attract their participation in Qatari healthcare. This method of

approaching investors—rather than waiting for them to approach us—has been quite successful.

Healthcare and pharmaceuticals are, quite obviously, immensely important for the country. The government has already established a number of institutions to bolster these areas. There are, today, a number of research centers in Qatar, which are launching multibillion-dollar projects. There is a new hospital that will lean more towards health research. And, in addition to Hammad Hospital's main activities, the center also has a number of research and development programs.

The reason that we believe it is important to stimulate R&D in the healthcare sector within Qatar is because each region has its own characteristics. Elements of concern to Qatar may not be of concern to other territories. I believe it is important that each country has its own research efforts dedicated to its own needs. Coordination between research centers and all other medical institutions is extremely important—hence, we welcome collaboration with facilities working in healthcare worldwide. Nonetheless, we do believe in having something of our own to address local affairs.

As part of the rollout of the 'Qatar Vision 2030,' Qatar is working to improve its healthcare schemes. Can you give our readers an overview of the program of reforms delineated in the 'National Healthcare Strategy 2011-2016?'

Currently, the government believes that it will be significantly more effective to have the private sector involved in healthcare. There is currently a major program to make healthcare insurance mandatory for all citizens. Its aim is to ensure everyone in Qatar has health insurance that will be covered by the government. The majority of healthcare, however, will come via private hospitals and private clinics.
This is the reason that we expect increased demand in the sector across hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies. We see huge opportunities for healthcare investors because of current government reforms—because of the ongoing public-to-private transfer.

Healthcare is a clear priority for our government. This is because the authorities are trying to invest increasingly in human development rather than the development of natural resources.

Focus Reports recently met with HE Abdulaziz bin Hamad bin Al Ageel, General Secretary of GOIC. Mr. Al Ageel mentioned that GOIC is generating as many synergies among Gulf economies as possible. In the same way, is the Investment Department of the Qatari MBT encouraging such intra-Gulf synergies—especially in the medical field?

We are. I believe that it is very useful to coordinate with neighboring institutions. Most of the GCC countries are relatively small; the only way to overcome this limitation is through collaboration.

Within our Department, we do rely on organizations like GOIC to realize such coordination. We fully cooperate with their policies in working with relevant healthcare institutions throughout the Gulf. There are always meetings, conferences, and other channels of communication among GCC countries.

Where would you like to take the Investment Promotion Department over the next two-three years?

We are trying to implement a strong model of foreign investment. For instance, let’s look at what has happened in the oil and gas sector. Ten or fifteen years ago, there was little to no foreign investment in this sector. The government took a number of very effective steps, wherein it invited several leading foreign oil and gas companies to operate within our borders. The sector henceforth became very efficient, and very successful.

I would love to see the same approach applied in other sectors—as we discussed, in healthcare, manufacturing, services, and etc. Healthcare is certainly quite important amongst these. The task before us is much more challenging than in the oil and gas sector—in oil and gas, at least, the reserves are clearly there. And yet, even in a sector like healthcare, we do have a solid foundation for foreign entities to commit investment. With institutions like the Qatar Science and Technology Park, the new hospitals and research centers underway, and etc., there is no shortage of large, well-funded, well-run institutions to participate in. Hopefully, just as we saw an abundance of foreign investment in oil and gas, we can see the same in healthcare. Let’s see what we can do over the next few years!

What is your final message to the international readers of Pharmaceutical Executive regarding the commitment of Qatar to affecting growth in healthcare?

The government is very committed to the healthcare sector. It is making huge investments in R&D, and the provision of healthcare to the people. We anticipate huge growth in the sector due to the new policies pertaining to the involvement of the private sector, as well as the development of new institutions through channels like the Qatar Foundation.

From our side, as the MBT, we will ensure that the way in which foreign organizations set up their business, the way they operate, and the way they expand, will be as smooth as possible. We want companies from around the world to know that Qatar is very open to their investment, and that the risk of investing in Qatar is extremely low.

We invite companies to make note of just how much Qatar is investing in healthcare per capita, and compare it to any other nation—they would see a huge gap! The money, on its own, will not do the job—this we know. However, this investment demonstrates our dedication. When I say dedication, I imply also that the government will support investors in other ways, as well.

On a personal note, what drives you to participate in the public sector?

Some people would say that the private sector is the engine of the economy. However, the government provides the steering. Even if the engine is running well, if the vehicle is not properly directed, that engine is useless. I believe that government lays the foundation for the private sector to grow. This endeavor is just as important as the private sector itself.

When I came to Doha, I saw a big gap in the public sector. I saw that there was a huge opportunity to enhance its mechanism of working—to the benefit of the private sector. This gap is one of the most important drivers that lead to me to work for the government.

Another driver is a bit more personal: the public sector always sees things from a macro perspective. It notes how all parts relate to each other. Private companies are more focused on specifics. I am a macro person! For this reason, I enjoy my work in government.

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