

Laboratoire National de Contrôle des Produits Pharmaceutiques (LNCPP) - Bouslimane Mohamed Mansouri, General Manager - Algeria



05.01.2015

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The general manager of Algeria's pharmaceuticals regulator narrates the founding and evolution of the institution, how it has been flexing its muscles with the withdrawal of no less than 17 products from the local market, and how the body has been selected to play a leading role in the WHO's Expert Advisory Panel on the International Pharmacopoeia and Pharmaceutical Preparations.

You have been directing the LNCPP since its establishment in the mid-1990s. What have been your organisation's main achievements to date? And what would you describe as the current priorities?

The laboratory was established back in 1995 with a view to managing the circulation of medicines within the country. We benefited from strong support on the part of the government because, since the opening up of the Algerian pharmaceutical industry to private sector participation, there had been no real regulatory structure in place. Initially many people were sceptical about the creation of the LNCPP and its capabilities, but our workforce has been rapidly expanding to the 350 personnel that we employ today and our expectation is that it won't be too long before we enjoy a human capital base of as many as 700 employees.

We are immensely proud to have built such a comprehensive institution. Today the LNCPP specialises in no fewer than 17 different areas spanning quality control, security and even training. We really are a unique entity and that is precisely why we are in the process of expanding our partnerships with international laboratories round the world.

Contrary to what one might have thought, the issue of financing has never been a problem for us in our development of the institution. It's all a question of having the right political will behind you. Beyond that, the secret to our success has been hard work. It's about continuing to work day and night as we did in the very beginning.

The main mission of the LNCPP is to ensure quality control of medicaments in Algeria and to foster expertise in pharmaceuticals. What are the main challenges your organisation has faced in carrying out that mandate? And what sorts of challenges do you expect to encounter in the future?

First of all, it was necessary to forge consensus and gain the support of all stakeholders – with private enterprise as much as with the government. Inevitably, in the beginning, many people were resistant to the idea of restrictions. This is why it was especially necessary to build up a coalition of support so as to avoid potential bottlenecks. This has been our stance ever since the inception of LNCPP. We engage in frank, open and respectful relationships with all actors – the manufacturers, the importers, the multinational conglomerates – whilst always bearing in mind our core mandate of safeguarding quality.

Ensuring quality control, for example, requires considerable human and financial resources. Because this is a matter of public health, we have been tasked with not tolerating any kind of non-adherence to quality standards. We are the body that, to date has successfully brought about the withdrawal of 17 products from multinational pharmaceutical companies because they failed to comply with the country's norms and quality standards.

In the future, we aspire to create two new public laboratories, one of which will be dedicated to biotechnology which is a growth sector. That's why we need to put in place strong structures and robust preparation. Our ambition is for Algeria to become the African lead nation for healthcare products and services from biotechnology to hospitals. The goal is to emulate the sort of dominance in healthcare and pharmaceuticals that the US has achieved, but on a regional and continental scale.

For the fourth consecutive time, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has renewed its support of the LNCPP as a reference laboratory across Africa and the Middle East.

What's the rationale behind this award? And to what extent does the LNCPP engage in collaboration with the WHO?

From the very beginning, we requested 'collaboration centre' status from the WHO. We considered it very important to gain international recognition from such a prestigious institution because doing so helps us raise considerable local support and backing. Ultimately, following a visit from a delegation of experts from the WHO, we were designated as a 'reference laboratory' which was well above our expectations.

Last year, the WHO even invited us to join an 'Expert Advisory Panel on the International Pharmacopoeia and Pharmaceutical Preparations,' which further demonstrates the increasingly influential role played by Algeria in healthcare at the regional and international levels. What makes us strong is that we possess a strong team with experienced staff. Our employees have been working here for a long time, they are happy to be here and proud to work for the development of the country.

Many experts believe that emerging countries like Algeria are the future of the pharmaceutical industry. In your opinion, what can the LNCPP bring not only to developed countries but also to the developing world?

The construction of two new public laboratories is going to be paramount if Algeria is to catch up with the leading countries of the pharmaceutical industry. I am confident that once we have developed our expertise in biotechnology, we will be able to enter the ranks of the world leaders. The idea is not to compete against other countries. On the contrary, our development of this expertise would be to benefit not only Algerian nationals, but the peoples of other developing countries.

Our infrastructure is of high quality, which is why we helped to build other facilities in other countries across the African continent. Our reputation precedes us and we feel compelled to train-up African scientists here and assist in the development of infrastructure in other African emergent countries. For many years, it was the French that helped build laboratories around Africa. Now that task falls to Algeria.

Last June, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Algeria and the United States for the creation of the biotechnology cluster in Sidi Abdallah (Algiers) as part of 'Algeria Vision 2020'. This includes the objective of rendering Algeria the Centre of Excellence in Biotechnology for the entire Africa and Middle East region. In what ways is Algeria best placed to assume this regional role?

We are extremely confident in our ability to build up our expertise and capabilities in the field of biotechnology. We have signed an agreement with our American partners for bi-lateral cooperation in this sector. Had we needed to lower our standards we would have renounced the collaboration agreement and we made this known to the Americans. However the Americans were firm that they wanted to cooperate with Algeria given our level of expertise which is probably unique within the region. Only Egypt has been a long term strategic partner with the United States in the healthcare and pharmaceutical field, but the mass uprisings have had the effect of suspending that collaboration. In Algeria, we will soon be creating the centre of excellence and are starting with the creation of a commission to determine its needs in terms of training, expertise and human resources.

What are the next steps for the LNCPP?

We are hoping that a framework can be created to separate commercial considerations from purely pharmaceutical and scientific questions. I believe this next step would enable us to make our organisation even more efficient.

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