Société Algérienne de Pharmacie – Dr. Farid Benhamdine, Président – Algeria



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The head of the society speaks out about the state of the pharmacy in Algeria and delivers suggestions for improving the profession. Discussion revolves around the need to create a national agency for pharmacy, the challenge of human capital sourcing and the status and role of hospital pharmacists.

The pharmaceutical industry in Algeria is relatively young. How has it evolved since 1990?

First, it is important to know that even before independence, Algeria already owned units of production. But it was after that the country really opened. Today, we can say that the pharmaceutical industry is the best student of Algeria because it meets 40 percent of the country's needs, because some protectionism promotes domestic production, and because it is dynamic and innovative, especially in terms of biotechnology and hormone production. Therefore, we are proud to talk about domestic production.

The pharmaceutical industry is a good student, but the income of Algeria mainly stems from oil and gas. What else is needed for the pharmaceutical industry to rise in prominence?

Four main aspects are missing. First, we must develop partnerships in terms of resources, technology, know-how, between the Algerian pharmaceutical companies—mostly small family businesses—and efficient foreign firms. Secondly, these Algerian companies should copy the model

of these large groups to compete and diversify. The state should also play a more significant role, particularly in terms of product registration, where the staff is sorely lacking.

The third element will be to reshape the National Agency for Pharmaceuticals, supposed to be created since 2008, but the ill-conceived law prevents it from being executed. Finally, we need to work on the failing or absent marketing strategies of the state: currently, the only vehicle to promote generics is reimbursement. These strategies, often lacking ethics, cannot yet compete with major international pharmaceutical companies.

The ultimate goal is the association of the means of each company and consultation of all the stakeholders to build a healthy economy and ethical pharmaceutical sector.

It seems that to achieve 70 percent coverage of the needs of the domestic market, there should be more visibility on the quantities and different types of products needed. What do you think?

There is a list of locally produced medicines at the Ministry of Health, but everyone has the freedom to produce what they like. That’s why I put so much emphasis on the importance of the National Agency for Pharmaceuticals: it would centralize the technical and administrative validation activities, now operated by different actors. It would also allow intercommunication among the many ministries involved (health, industry, labor etc.) and create effective and coherent decision-making. In short, it would encourage the harmonization of all the health care system, and therefore more focused and diversified production.

What should Algeria do to overcome the lack of personnel, crucial to develop a pharmaceutical industry worthy of the name?

Human resources are the wealth of Algeria, and of any other country. In the past, we had one faculty of pharmacy; today we have eight or nine. But that does not mean that number of teachers follows the same rate. The programs are also sclerotic.

We must work on establishing a close and dynamic relationship between pharmaceutical companies and universities. Concretely, this means fostering placements – even make them mandatory, so that our graduates are operational; send people abroad for training; and encourage skilled foreigners to work in Algeria.

The Algerian pharmaceutical industry must be open, not only to partnerships with major groups, but also with universities.

What can you tell us about the particular case of hospital pharmacy in Algeria?

It is completely ignored. There aren't enough hospital pharmacists being trained in sufficient numbers, and they should be more specialized. They also lack status: they are not recognized or rewarded as they should be for their quality of work. While their role should be central, since the biggest diseases are treated in hospitals (and not in a clinic or private practice), they do not take part in decision making in the choice of a particular drug and aren't in permanent contact with the central pharmacy. All this must change, so that the profession of hospital pharmacist is no longer the last chosen, and instead become valued.

One of the objectives of Algeria is to become a center for biotechnology by 2020. What is lacking for it to reach its objective?

To get to be a biotechnology cluster, it is necessary that Algeria invest in research. To do research, you need quality and local researchers, so that Algeria could benefit from it. It also requires results: for the moment, there has been no major Algerian discovery. Results require the financial and technological means. And in this perspective, the salary is far from the only significant element to advance research: it takes a working environment and intercommunication opportunities with researchers around the world.

Finally, to inform about biotechnology is crucial so that doctors and pharmacists get interested in it and prescribe these types of drugs as well as continuing to encourage domestic production.

Where would you like Algeria to be in the next five years?

I hope the country opens up, emphasizes research and innovation and promotes partnerships and associations for its pharmaceutical industry to develop.

The Algerian healthcare system is already among the best in Africa, the social security system (with rebate) ensures a consistent market, as does the ever-increasing demand from an aging population with strong purchasing power. The number of prescribers also continues to increase. All in all, the Algerian pharmaceutical industry is dynamic and innovative, and human resources possess all the potential required, they just lack a more motivational impetus.

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