

Interview: Ramy Koussa - Managing Director, MSD, Egypt



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The Managing Director of MSD Egypt highlights MSD's unique incentives to further collaborate with the Egyptian medical community and explains how market peculiarities shape product launches in developing countries like Egypt.

As newly appointed Managing Director for MSD Egypt, could you please outline your objectives and ambitions in the Egyptian market?

My overall objective is to provide suitable and innovative healthcare solutions for more Egyptians and drive growth in a sustainable way. In addition to a rapidly growing population and the contemporaneously rising need of vaccination, Egyptians are carrying the burden of a high prevalence of Hepatitis C, Diabetes, Cardiovascular diseases, various forms of cancer and hospitalization. We provide well established value adding products in these key areas and as a leading company in these resorts; I firmly believe we will be able to significantly alleviate this Egyptian burden. My short term focus lies on the currently discussed reforms regarding the pharmaceutical and healthcare sector, the results of which are yet unclear thus not providing long term clarity of the market framework. My ambition is to navigate MSD Egypt through these turbulent times into clarity, in order to emerge as one of the top 5 pharmaceutical companies once the dust has settled down in Egypt.

You're an expert in pharmaceutical marketing. As such, how do you successfully launch products in a market like Egypt?

In the pharmaceutical industry it is never a 'product launch', but the launch of a certain set of services to the patients, medical community, stakeholders and relevant regulatory authorities. When MSD launches a set of services, they are held to the highest quality standards in order to bring the highest value to the patient. To fulfill these quality expectations, the unique peculiarities each individual market exhibits have to be scrutinized to provide the maximum value possible in the areas of: affordability, accessibility, supporting programs, patient and healthcare education.

As a multinational pharmaceutical company, in an environment like Egypt's, MSD has the responsibility to close knowledge gaps, and create awareness of diseases, its prevention and latest advancements in the whole medical community. I am confident that we will have a significant role to play in the continuous education of patients, medical staff, healthcare personal and paramedics in Egypt.

What are particular Initiatives you would like to highlight?

In the past decade, MSD Egypt occupied a leading role in Egypt's battle against Hepatitis C. We understood the socio-economic allocation of the lower and middle class within the population, and accordingly we were able to provide high quality medicine and treatments at one of the lowest prices in the world. We had recently been working with the National Committee for the Control of Viral Hepatitis (NCCVH) on campaigns covering the whole Middle East. The purpose was to further create updated and continuous awareness of Hepatitis C.

A campaign I am particularly proud of is the Ramadan Diabetes Support Campaign. For diabetic Muslims, it can be a challenge to fulfill religious customs during Ramadan which is of particular significance as religion in the Middle East is far more embedded in societal expectations and is generally part of the patient's core values . The campaign is foremost an educational campaign, narrating multiple alternatives of combining religious customs with health. The campaign explained dietary habits that would keep the glucose level well controlled during the fasting period, it provided nursing training, cookery books and discussed how and why hypoglycemia occurs.

What are the opportunities MSD Egypt offers for Egypt and Egyptians?

We enjoy being part of Merck's worldwide pipeline, which creates a large opportunity for Egypt as it enables us to provide Egyptian patients with the most innovative treatments straight from our research laboratories in the US. Especially for Hepatitis C, which we realize as the most significant

medical challenge in Egypt, We will continue to support the government in overcoming this challenge, while we ensure bringing the latest advancements to Egypt as worldwide leaders in oncology, diabetes, hospital care and vaccines. I am confident that further investments in these fields will lead to further innovations to current treatments, which will ultimately reach and help Egyptians.

We also aim to provide added value to our local partners as a result of our collaboration together . During the last few decades we have worked with over 7 factories in Egypt and trained thousands of workers, chemists & pharmacists on good manufacturing practices.

How do you assess Egypt's significance within the MENA region?

Egypt's pharmaceutical market has been growing significantly in recent years; it has one of the largest and fastest growing populations in the region and we recognize Egypt as the second largest market with the potential to become the largest in the MENA region. For this potential to become a reality, intellectual property rights have to be improved significantly, the registration process of innovative drugs has to become faster and pricing, especially in light of currency devaluation, has to be re-discussed. That being said, we observe true progress in the health insurance system reform plans and we are confident that these, together with other efforts, will bear fruit in near future. Once realized, Egypt's potential to become the key market in the region will be a matter of fact!

"Egypt back in Business", what does that mean to you?

We see all the signs of hope; the plan is in place, we are confident that the reforms are significant steps in the right direction and the public sector initiative for a better future is present. In this context, we have to understand that we are still in an early phase of change and we have to be patient; yet I am optimistic. Recent past has proven that if the Egyptian people have the desire for change; this desire translates into tangible success and I am confident this will also apply in the healthcare sector.

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