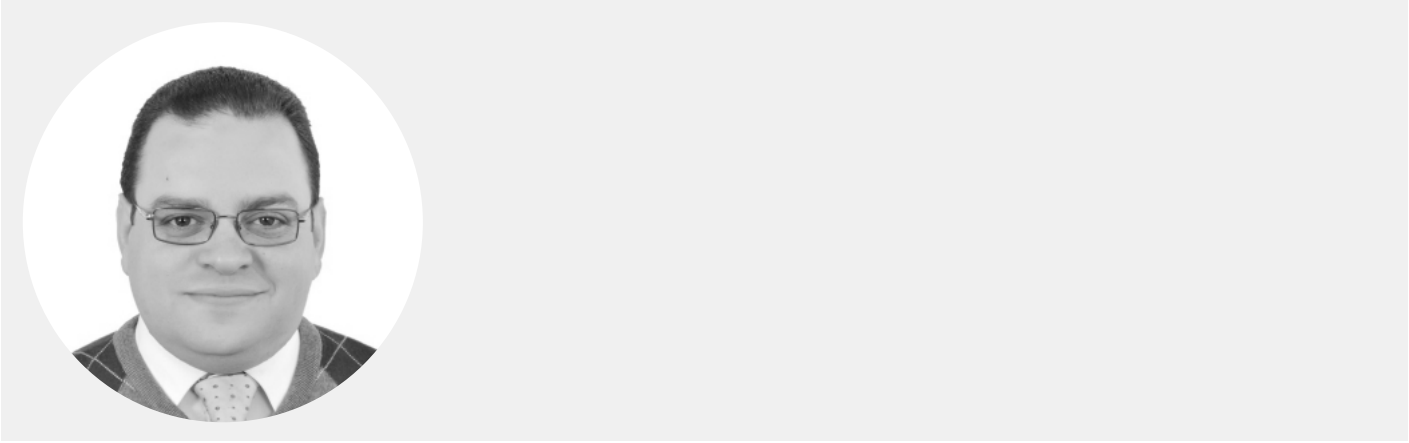
Interview: Mohamed El-Sahhar – Country Head, Boehringer Ingelheim Egypt



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Egypt is at the 'golden stage' for investment, claims Boehringer Ingelheim country head Mohamed El-Sahhar, who explains how the company is expanding their organization in Egypt ahead of an expansion into diabetes and oncology.

Egypt's international image is still heavily influenced by the political instability of 2011 to 2013; what does the global pharmaceutical industry need to understand about the reality in Egypt today?

The situation has changed completely over the last two years, with major changes made at the economic and political level. Egypt's political and business environment is much more stable, and several positive economic developments have occurred, such as the opening of the new Suez Canal and the ENI discovery of the largest gas field in the Mediterranean, which will both attract foreign currency to Egypt. A few days ago, Egypt's population officially reached 90 million people; there is a large and growing domestic market in Egypt, and the government has demonstrated their commitment to improving education and healthcare in Egypt by substantially increasing the government budget for these two areas.

Of course, certain challenges still remain, however it is clear that the country is moving in the right direction. As such, I am confident that this is the right time to invest in Egypt. This is the 'golden

stage’ for Egypt, and even more so for the pharmaceutical market, because the government has begun reforming policies to attract investment and help investors expand in the Egyptian market. Therefore, I strongly believe that if you are not in Egypt, you should come, and if you are here already, you should expand.

What would you identify as the key differences between Egypt and the other markets that you have worked in?

As I previously worked in Saudi Arabia, let me compare Egypt to Saudi Arabia for a moment. One of the main differences between Saudi Arabia and Egypt is that Egypt is a predominantly out-of-pocket market, at roughly 75 percent. In Saudi Arabia, the majority of the population is covered by institutions, such as the Ministry of Health, who invest a lot in healthcare and pharmaceutical infrastructure. In Egypt, there are observable improvements in this area, but there is still a long road ahead and much to be done to establish strong institutions that can provide healthcare coverage for a high percentage of the population. As such, it is the retail market that drives our business in Egypt, and to succeed in this out-of-pocket market the key is to make high quality medicine available at affordable prices. The price of medicine is actually one of the key issues that determines access, as individual patients must be able to afford the products that we have registered in Egypt to be able to use them; to this end, although our products are imported from Germany, we adjust the prices to local levels to support patient access to our products.

Boehringer Ingelheim is a global leader in pneumology and COPD; from this perspective, how do you assess the level of awareness and treatment standards for breathing disorders in Egypt?

Given the enormous prevalence of smoking and pollution in Egypt, and especially in Cairo, a lot of people suffer from COPD. Unfortunately, awareness regarding COPD is very low amongst both patients and doctors. Patients often blame their age for heavy breathing, instead of recognizing a problem in their lungs, and COPD is often mistaken for asthma by both patients and doctors. Since we have a great product for COPD, and more in our pipeline, a key aim of Boehringer Ingelheim is to increase awareness of this disease, among both doctors and patients. However, we also see the need for greater awareness in other areas such as diabetes and hypertension.

You assumed the general manager role in 2013; what mission were you initially given and how much progresses have you made towards achieving it?

My main objective when I arrived was to ensure a successful launch of our new products as well as maintain & improve the performance of our existing portfolio. This was particularly important

because some of the products are truly lifesaving, and increasing the use of these medications certainly helped to save more people's lives.

Personally, this is the reason that I am motivated and happy to work in this industry and for Boehringer Ingelheim; while this is a business, the drugs we provide are able to save lives. At Boehringer Ingelheim, this passion for saving lives is instilled among every employee, regardless of position. Moreover, we need to be passionate, as this is what allows us to communicate the scientific knowledge about our products to doctors in a clear and effective way. It is through this communication that we can insure that the right medicine reaches the right patient – an area where there is still a gap to fill in Egypt.

Boehringer Ingelheim's global pipeline is quite promising; which products are you currently preparing to launch in Egypt?

Boehringer Ingelheim's ultimate goal is to help improve patient's lives by providing innovative medications that can deliver extraordinary results. To do this in Egypt, the first step is getting our products registered, and because for some of the patients in need of our products there are no effective alternatives available, it is crucial that we accomplish this as quickly as possible. As such, we do our very best to register products in Egypt as soon as possible, and as such we already have many of Boehringer Ingelheim's most recent products available in Egypt. However, before any product can be introduced in the Egyptian market, it must first be marketed in country of origin for one to two years, so once this initial time frame has passed we immediately start the registration process.

We are very fortunate to have a strong product pipeline for the upcoming years, which includes both new molecules and extensions of existing molecules, which is the case for Micardis for example. At present, we are preparing to introduce our diabetes portfolio in Egypt, with the first product set to launch by Q2- 2016. To support the promotion of this portfolio, we have hired 70 new employees over the last few months, bringing our total headcount to about 200 people in Egypt. We are very excited about this upcoming launch because it is a truly amazing product, which will significantly improve the lives of diabetes patients at risk of or experiencing kidney complications.

In addition, we are finalizing plans to launch our oncology portfolio in the first quarter of 2016, and our teams are already excited and beginning to prepare for this development.

What other investments will Boehringer Ingelheim be making in Egypt to support this expansion?

In general, Boehringer Ingelheim looks beyond profits, and focuses far more on how many lives we impact. The more people we are able to reach with our medications, the better our business does, and the more we can invest to help patients. In Egypt, one key challenge is to reach the patients outside of metropolitan areas, who live in remote areas. As such, one of our goals is to increase our market penetration in Egypt, and to do so we will be steadily increasing the number of distributors that we work with here in Egypt.

Secondly, after registering new products, physicians and patients must be made aware of new products and of their advantages; marketing and promotion activities play a key role in this area, however Boehringer Ingelheim also invests in continuous scientific medical education of physicians. By funding programs and organizing conferences that bring international speakers to Egypt, Boehringer Ingelheim helps to ensure that doctors are updated regarding the latest scientific and medical developments, helping them to understand the advantages that innovative medicines can offer to their patients.

Right now we are operating in Egypt as a scientific office, while our agent legally imports our products. It worth mentioning here that Boehringer Ingelheim has some products already manufactured locally in Egypt since more than 40 years and it is still supplied to the Egyptian market, which also represents our faith in the Egyptian market. For the last 40 years Boehringer Ingelheim has many products that are manufactured here in Egypt and this helps us to offer better prices and ongoing availability.

How is Boehringer Ingelheim working to increase awareness and encourage better health decisions through the “Making More Health” program?

We believe that as a multinational pharmaceutical company in Egypt, we have a social responsibility towards the country. Resulting from this firm belief, we have engaged in different partnerships to increase awareness in different problem areas.

Making More Health is an initiative of Boehringer Ingelheim and Ashoka on a global level, launched in 2010. It builds on the track record of both Ashoka and Boehringer Ingelheim as leading and innovative organizations. By bringing their respective skills together, they aim to promote new ways of “Making More Health.”

“Making More Health” is also the description of what Ashoka and Boehringer Ingelheim will work on together to bring to the world.

In this context, “more health” means contributing to the health of individiuals, the community, and the environment.

In Egypt we have two fellows; the first one tackled a major issue with a very effective idea, Hisham Kharma who initiated “Law 3andak Dam” an online platform that connects blood donors to patients. When a person fills out the “I Need blood” form, the system, which is also connected to Facebook and Twitter, automatically sends out an email notice to potential donors, thus creating a more efficient process to connect patients with donors.

Hisham has directly helped 3,000 individuals in need of blood to find the right matches. His platform has been active in helping people affected by several tragic events. After just 5 days of the platform launch, Hisham gathered more than 600 donors without using any advertisements or marketing materials.

Our second Fellow, IS Waleed Shawki, founder of “Medicine For All”,in Egypt we have annual medicine wastes estimated to be 1 billion Egyptian Pounds. Due to the trending consuming behavior, consumers usually buy more than their needs of medicine, ending up not using it before the expiration date. In addition, at most cases consumers do not have to use all medicine as per the doctors’ prescriptions. Not to mention that most of medications in Egypt are over the counter, without the need of any prescription.

Waleed, witnessing this problem first hand as a pharmacist, built a community-based system to collect, sort and distribute medicine to low-income families in Egypt using medicine wasted by affluent households, pharmacies and pharmaceutical companies.

Waleed’s distribution chain has benefited more than 1,000 patients per month. His work saves the community, pharmacies and pharmaceutical companies an estimated 50,000 USD annually through recycling unused medicine. Waleed’s future plans include establishing 10 new educational pharmacies to expand his reach to other cities in Egypt.

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