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01.04.2019

Tags: Egypt, Dermatology, LEO Pharma, Skincare

Amir Ghattas, senior director of the MENA cluster at LEO Pharma, highlights how the company is raising awareness for dermatological diseases in Egypt, having adopted a highly patient-centric focus. He also explains how LEO Pharma's recent acquisitions and internal restructuration has benefitted the regional operations in the MENA cluster.

Apart from your responsibilities in the Egyptian affiliate, you are also the MENA regional director for LEO Pharma. Can you give our international readers an overview of the cluster you are heading?

LEO Pharma's MENA cluster has been restructured in 2017 and now includes Egypt, the Levant, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Maghreb countries as well as the French-Speaking African countries as part of the ALMA region, which comprises Asian, Latina America, Middle East and Africa. The cluster includes more than 33 countries, which have established different business models due to individual differences. There is a factor of political instability in some countries and the cultural diversity also provides great challenges, but we have a great team in place that is tackling these issues very well. On the other hand, the new clusterization allows us to learn from best practices, that work in other countries, and to optimize our resources and to facilitate our business. The two key markets for the cluster are Egypt and Algeria, with other countries like Morocco, Jordan and Lebanon, Iraq and Libya also having significant importance for the cluster.

How strategically significant is your cluster and the Egyptian market in particular to LEO Pharma?

The Egyptian pharmaceutical market is a key market with a strong and solid growth rate, having an expected CAGR of nine percent until 2022, and it is set to rise five or six places in the global ranking. With a population of 100 million and a strong private sector, Egypt was an obvious choice for LEO Pharma as a base for our regional operations. We have been in the country for almost 50 years and really have been benefitting from the talent in Egypt and the recent political stability. The cluster is one of the most valuable in the company, with the Egyptian business posting double-digit sales growth in the last few years.

LEO Pharma has undergone a lot of structural changes in recent times; especially through unit acquisitions of Astellas and Bayer and a partnership with AZ. How have these activities at a global level trickled down to the local Egyptian affiliate?

The acquisition of Astellas' dermatology portfolio in 2015 has significantly impacted the MENA cluster. In markets like Algeria and the Levant, these products have already been on the market, so we just had to take them over. In contrast, in countries like Egypt, we are in the final stage of registration for these products, as they have not been distributed in the market before. We expect these products to add to our strong dermatology portfolio. The same strategy will be applied for Bayer's products; however, we are still in the early steps, because the official takeover date is July 1st, 2019. We are very positive about the impact these two new portfolio lines will have for patients in the cluster and especially in Egypt.

LEO Pharma's headquarters has recently taken a giant leap into biological dermatology with the launch of Kyntheum®. What is the potential of launching these innovative types of treatment in Egypt on day one?

Generally, there has been a lot of work done by the authorities and the MOH to facilitate registration processes and it is now much easier than a few years back. While there are still challenges, the country is on the right track when it comes to bringing innovation to the country. We have more clarity on the process and fast-track registration is now available for some products and we see future improvements to come.

With LEO Pharma’s leap into the biological sector, we can reach a new segment of patients and there is also a high demand for biological treatments in Egypt particularly. Currently, we are investigating what is the best way to bring such type of treatments to the market and be able to deliver this new treatment from LEO to the Egyptian patients. There is a lot of research needed and we will be using the best practices that LEO Pharma has used in European markets and adapt it to the regional needs and circumstances here.

What is the strategy to increase the number of patients treated with LEO Pharma’s products in a challenging market like Egypt, where awareness for skin diseases is low?

The pharmacies do play a huge role in Egypt, as the out-of-pocket spending is very high, which means that some patients might prefer self-medication before seeing doctors, particularly in rural areas. Especially in the dermatology sector, awareness is not optimal, which is the reason why we have rolled out many campaigns in partnership with other stakeholders. One of LEO Pharma’s corporate social responsibility projects is about raising awareness through mobile clinics, partnering with universities in the country. This was not a promotional campaign, but generally about raising awareness of dermatological diseases. Another project called “My dear skin” is a Facebook platform offering 360-communication, focused on educating patients on skin diseases and directing them to seek medical advice from HCPs. Additionally, we are collaborating with NGOs that sends doctors to smaller villages in rural areas, offering help and educating on dermatological issues and encouraging people to seek medical advice from physicians. We have done this in a few areas last year and will continue doing so this year, as it is our commitment to society.

Your global CEO Gitte Aabo stated Patient-centricity is a large part of LEO’s global 2025 Strategy. What initiatives do you have in place in that regard in Egypt?

Patient-centricity starts internally by changing the mindset of our employees. We have started embedding this concept by changing the internal titles, for example switching “product manager” to “patient solution manager”, to get this sense of responsibility into all aspects of our operations. We then established an ethos of “Patients first and business will follow” to add value to our operations. Even after the devaluation of the Egyptian currency in 2016, we continued our business in the country, supplying our products as usual, as we are committed to the patients and believe in the potential of Egypt. We are very focused on our own culture of being a reliable partner to physicians and hospitals by doing groundwork on the field, to see what the real challenges for

patients and healthcare professionals are.

What would you highlight as the most interesting developments and initiatives launched as a result of the government's focus on healthcare?

The government is doing a great job and has responded to the people's call of putting healthcare as a priority. However, projects of this magnitude will not happen overnight, so patience is needed. The new National Health Insurance project will benefit many people, so this clearly will fundamentally change the healthcare ecosystem in Egypt in the next few years. The whole community and pharma industry as well needs to support these efforts of the government to elevate Egyptian healthcare to the next level.

What is LEO Pharma's main competitive advantage that sets the company apart from current competitors and potential newcomers?

LEO Pharma is a very patient-focused company serving Egyptian patients for years. We have built a very strong brand known for its excellent quality, but our products are also very affordable for Egyptian patients. This is because we are locally manufacturing parts of our portfolio in the country. Our activities support the whole ecosystem, aimed at patients and society, so it is not only the product but also education and raising awareness, which makes us the partner of choice. We also understand the importance of having open communication with policy-makers as a way of providing them with useful and timely information about medical conditions for the benefit of patients, and of ensuring industry participation in the political process.

Where would you like to see LEO Pharma Egypt in five years?

LEO Pharma wants to be perceived as a preferred dermatology care partner of the government, healthcare community and society. our aim is to build on the strong reputation our brands have, not only as a supplier of products but also as a service and solutions provider. We keep patients and their quality of life at the heart of everything we do, and we will take more measures to improve patient-centricity in the future.

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