Basyouni Abuseif – Country President and CPO Head, Novartis Egypt



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Basyouni Abuseif, country president and CPO Head at Novartis Egypt, explains how the Swiss company has taken over the leadership position in the Egyptian pharmaceutical market despite economic and political challenges. He also highlights recent achievements of the government in fighting Hepatitis C, while emphasizing the need for more attention on matters like pricing and clinical trials in the country.

You will celebrate your five-year anniversary as the head of Novartis Egypt in May. What would you highlight as your main achievements leading the affiliate since 2014?

I believe it is my almost 30-year experience in the pharmaceutical industry – taking on different roles in different countries at three multinational companies – which has helped me prepare well for my current position. In addition to that, I am immensely glad and proud to be back in my home country, where I feel an even greater responsibility to contribute to improving healthcare. Perhaps our most visible achievement has been our team's ascension to – and maintaining of – the leadership position in the Egyptian pharmaceutical market. We first achieved this milestone in 2015, as a result of our determined efforts and an unrelenting drive to reach the summit. This breakthrough was perhaps even more remarkable for its timing, as we managed to reach this position in the midst of a period of economic volatility and challenges, but where Novartis Egypt

was able to continue to record solid and sustainable growth year by year. We are very proud of our success and we remain 100 percent committed to continuing to “lead with pride” and to cement our position.

Even in times of economic turmoil you have been outgrowing the market. What has been you secret to success for achieving growth in challenging circumstances?

It all starts with the right mindset and from day one we tried to adopt an approach of absolute focus on our patients, on achieving more for them and remaining constantly aware of their centrality to our goals and operations at all levels.

The second element behind our success is our people; we seek to recruit talented and ambitious individuals who can also demonstrate their capacity for teamwork. It is the composition of our teams that help us make a difference, so, we have gone to great lengths to select the best associates we continue to invest in training them where necessary and on retaining them for as long as possible.

The third element is related to establishing the right culture of innovation, inspiration, un-bossing and a commitment to integrity to ensure sustainable business and growth.

These three pillars are essential to our ability to reach and maintain execution excellence, with every member of the organization sharing in the pride of a job well done, with the leadership team setting the role model & path to follow.

The fourth success factor is investing properly in all aspects that back our key and strategic brands and introducing our new therapies to Egypt as rapidly as possible. This meant that even in 2017 – the first year after EGP devaluation – we launched two significant strategic products in Egypt (Cosentyx in April and Entresto in October).

How hard was to convince the headquarters to continue investments in Egypt during the times of economic instability?

I will be honest; it was a very difficult mission but one, in my view, that was always achievable. However, Novartis remained committed to Egypt and to investing in its operations here, knowing the size of the market, and having the utmost confidence in our ability – as the people of Egypt – to get our economy back on the right track and on a path towards growth. Our purpose remained the

same, to help Egyptians have access to the treatments they need. One significant example of our commitment to this purpose has been the number of new launches undertaken by our divisions (Pharma, Oncology and Sandoz) in Egypt over the course of less than twelve months post-devaluation. Our investment plan which is geared towards upgrading our manufacturing site in Egypt also bears testament to our continued confidence in the Egyptian economy.

How is the global portfolio represented on the local level?

Novartis operates three divisions in Egypt, all with the same purpose and commitment of introducing new therapies and treatment to help improve and extend the lives of our Egyptian patients.

Our Pharma division for example has managed to launch five molecules over the last three years and we are planning to introduce a new migraine treatment before the end of this year, with three more scheduled for the next two years.

In Oncology, our new cancer gene therapy treatment (CAR-T) is underway but is currently being used on a case-by-case basis, with patients applying and receiving treatment where that is deemed to be the most appropriate and effective course of action. Our long-term goal is to become a hub for gene therapy and to allow as many patients as possible to have access to cutting edge technology and treatment.

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

We are very happy with the progress made in addressing the country’s healthcare challenges and we are ready and looking forward to working with all the relevant stakeholders to support the country in this mission. The government has accomplished a great deal, particularly in managing the Hepatitis C issue. It succeeded in implementing a program that was unique and unprecedented, and one which received deserved domestic and global accolades. The 100 million Seha, Nour Hayah and primary school pupil screening programs also represent great health initiatives that have our full support. I have complete confidence that such initiatives and other similar efforts will help improve the health of millions of patients by providing them with the right treatment at the right time. Moreover they are also helping to establish a database that can contribute to the prevention and optimal management of diseases in the future, whether via the universal

healthcare act or under the umbrella of any other coordinated healthcare system. Some issues continue to represent challenges, but our hope is that they will all be addressed and resolved in the very near future.

Can you elaborate which issues you are referring to?

The clinical trial law is one such topic for example. As we all know, clinical trials represent a vital avenue of access for patients, allowing them to receive innovative medications at an earlier stage of their development and perhaps saving their lives or at least bringing their disease under control. Clinical trials bring investment to the country, helping connect treating doctors with authorities and organizations, so our hope is that the relevant legislation will be passed as soon as possible. This is also a great opportunity for us to thank the President for rejecting the first draft of the law and for providing clear direction to the parliamentary healthcare committee, so that it is able to work on finalizing and publishing a law that is balanced and acceptable to all parties involved, and to do so as quickly as possible.

The second issue is related to the pricing mechanism of pharmaceutical products in general. We have been in open dialogues and discussions with all relevant stakeholders for a long time, however, there has been little movement concerning this matter. We are confident that it will receive the necessary attention to ensure companies' continued commitment to investing in- and expanding their operations in Egypt.

The third issue that concerns us and which requires immediate attention is drug counterfeiting and the management of this ongoing challenge. It is a complex issue, but one that has potentially grave consequences on people's health and it must be expertly handled by authorities so that it does not continue to represent a threat to patients.

Novartis has a long-standing tradition of manufacturing in Egypt, also exporting to other countries in Latin America and even to Switzerland. What has rendered such an exceptional achievement of manufacturing for European countries?

Our commitment to quality means that all our manufacturing sites adhere to the strictest of standards and this applies to Egypt as well. This means that our manufacturing site in Egypt manufactures products that are not only suitable for local use but can just as easily be exported to other countries, even to Switzerland, the very heart of our international operations. Novartis

products are of the highest quality no matter the country of production. Our current export target countries include Switzerland as well as eight African nations and we are looking to triple our export figures in the next few years.

Novartis has operated a manufacturing facility in Egypt for over 60 years, serving more than 20 Million patients. 90 percent of our production is for the domestic market, which has allowed us to offer our products at a low price and which helped us reach the leadership position in the market. Even during economic upheavals, we continued to invest in- and upgrade our facilities to prevent any supply disruptions.

Where would you like to see Novartis Egypt in five years?

I believe we have all the factors in place for continued success at Novartis Egypt. We have the right mindset, the talented people and the right culture, in addition to one of the strongest medical product pipelines. So, in five years, I would like to see Novartis Egypt launching more new innovative medicines, strengthening its partnership with stakeholders, supporting millions of patients more than it does already, doubling our size, becoming the employer of choice in Egypt and continuing to “Lead with Pride”. It is an ambitious set of goals, but I am confident we can achieve it all.

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