# Khaled Elrefae – Middle East and Africa Specialty Care Operations Head, Ipsen UAE



***This is part of our innovation story, which is to provide the right medication to the right patients at the right time.***

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*Khaled Elrefae, Middle East and Africa Specialty Care Operations Head (GM) for Ipsen, highlights Ipsen's impressive internationalization strategy and the success factors as well as rationale behind the company entrance to the MEA market with the newly established affiliate in UAE. He then discusses his mandate to drive a transformation of the organization in line with the company's global strategy, as well as his priorities of launching a new portfolio and building Ipsen's brand recognition as an innovative biopharmaceutical company that will significantly increase patient outcomes in the region.*

**You have been brought in to help establish and lead Ipsen's Middle East and Africa (MEA) operations. Having been in the position for two years, what have been your main priorities and areas of focus in establishing the affiliate?**

The MEA operation is aligned with Ipsen's global vision, which is to be a biopharmaceutical leader with a focus on innovation and specialty care. In the Middle East, we are passionately transforming everyday efforts into valuable outcomes for patients. To achieve this mission, we have identified a

series of priorities. Firstly, Ipsen is willing to accelerate patient access to our innovative treatments. This is a crucial factor, not only in ensuring patients have timely access to drugs, but also to provide patient solutions. In 2016 Ipsen had no products registered in Saudi Arabia; nevertheless, in the past two years, we have succeeded in introducing our portfolio in the country by conducting regular meetings with SFDA officials and highlighting the value our portfolio brings to patients. This enabled timely access of patients to our portfolio.

Secondly, Ipsen is keen to establish partnerships with various Ministries of Health (MOH) and competent health authorities across the region. As part of our collaboration with these authorities, Ipsen will be working to increase disease awareness related to our three core therapeutic areas: Oncology, Neuroscience and Rare Diseases. Indeed, there are many unmet medical needs in the region and governments could leverage our support in providing solutions for these challenges. Furthermore, our support spans beyond bringing innovative drugs to the region and into supporting continuous medical education for health care professionals such as doctors and nurses.

Finally, a major challenge for all companies in the region is a lack of freely available epidemiological data. This represents an amazing opportunity for Ipsen to collaborate on research which is why we are also building up our clinical research capabilities.

**What is the importance of the MEA operation to Ipsen globally?**

In 2018, our performance in specialty care operations grew by 23% in the Middle East, and as an organization we were proud to announce an overall growth of 20%. Our third-quarter growth for 2019 has recently been released: we have achieved 17% growth in specialty care and an overall growth rate of 14% globally.

**Ipsen’s key therapeutic areas are Oncology, Neuroscience, and Rare Diseases. How is Ipsen’s portfolio adapted to meet the needs of the region?**

There are clear unmet medical needs in the region. With our innovative and well-differentiated value-based medicines, we are helping stakeholders to provide the best medication. This is part of our innovation story, which is to provide the right medication to the right patients at the right time.

For example, in the therapeutic area of oncology, we offer differentiated and innovative products in many areas, such as renal cell carcinoma (RCC) where Cabometyx is tyrosine kinase inhibitor (TKI)

of choice for first- or second-line based on unique data. Furthermore, in hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), Cabometyx is approved for second-line setting. Additionally, Somatuline® and Diphereline offer substantial value to neuroendocrine tumors and prostate cancer patients.

**Given Ipsen is so new to the region, do you have any recent or upcoming launches we should be aware of?**

In 2018 we started launching Ipsen's products in Saudi Arabia, which has been a great success. Moreover, Ipsen will soon be launching Cabometyx across the Middle East in Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Turkey. This is a prime example of not only bringing innovations to the market but also bringing them as fast as possible to meet patients' needs. One of the main challenges in the Middle East region is the two-year delay in bringing innovations to the region after FDA approvals. We are, therefore, working closely with the MOH to highlight the various unmet medical needs and the value that Ipsen can bring to these countries.

From a global standpoint, I would like to highlight that in April 2019 Ipsen acquired Clementia to further cement our footprint in rare diseases. Ipsen is looking forward to filing and launching the first indication of Palovarotene in Fibrodyplasia Ossificans Progressiva (FOP) in the US during 2020.

**David Meek, CEO of Ipsen, has a strategy to target external innovation collaborations. To what extent is the UAE fertile ground for innovation?**

Yes indeed. A prime example of this is our recent deal with Blueprint announced in October 2019 and the recent acquisition of the Canadian biotech Clementia. For us here in the Middle East, Ipsen UAE's first step is to bring our well-differentiated and innovative products to the region, and subsequently collaborate with the MOH to provide clinical solutions for current unmet medical needs through clinical research. Finally, I am extremely proud of the in-depth transformation at Ipsen over the last few years. Our CEO David Meek is used to saying "Patients can't wait"; that is indeed our strategic driver.

**You are a strong believer in people making a difference, in the context of CSR and providing aid in crisis markets. What is Ipsen doing to provide health equity for countries suffering from political instability in the region?**

One of the challenges we face in the Middle East is political instability. Some healthcare systems aim to provide medical support for patients impacted by political conflicts within the regions. At Ipsen, we are working every day to ensure our medicines are available and accessible for those patients primarily through the hospitals.

**Many pharma companies have chosen the UAE as the country of choice to establish a commercial hub in the region. How do you see the ease of doing business here?**

When we were reflecting upon where to open our office, it was clear the UAE was the place to be located due to the ease of doing business. There are also many facilities available and a large amount of government support. Another important point is the diverse range of talent which is key to build up Ipsen's presence in the region with well-qualified individuals on hand to support us in our transformation journey.

**As a new entrant to the market, what reputation and qualities would you like Ipsen to be recognized for within the UAE and wider in the MEA region?**

This is part of our global vision, which is to establish Ipsen as a global biopharmaceutical company focusing on innovation and specialty care. We want to position Ipsen as a key player in Oncology, Neuroscience, and Rare Diseases by providing innovative, well-differentiated value solutions to patients and all stakeholders.

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