

Dream Samir - Secretary General, PHRMAG



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The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers Association Gulf (PHRMAG) represents the region's leading innovative biopharmaceutical research companies.

Dream Samir, secretary general of the organization, discusses PHRMAG's efforts to continue impacting the region's pharmaceutical industry, the priorities of the private sector and why the UAE is well positioned to compete on the global stage.

Could you begin by introducing PHRMAG and yourself to our audience?

I began my pharmaceutical career at Janssen, then moved to Novartis in Egypt and finally came to the UAE to work with MSD. Finally, in 2009, I moved to Merck Serono as the regional managing director and head of Middle East and Saudi Arabia. I decided to leave the private sector during the peak of my corporate career because I realized there was a tremendous need for people to play a more active role in pharmaceutical associations, as they bring a great deal of support to the table.

PHRMAG was established in 2005 to create a central location and voice for the private sector. In 2016, the association approached me to take over the role of secretary general, and ever since it has been my mission to implement the crucial support needed in the region. All 25 multinational pharmaceutical companies present in the UAE are members of PHRMAG and our objective is to support, discuss and have a continuous dialogue with government and policymakers. The topics we typically discuss with policymakers are related to enhancing the healthcare profession, healthcare

innovation, and the capabilities of the countries we operate in. We are interested in becoming more competitive and more visible on the global stage, in terms of innovation, manufacturing and policies that allow necessary medicines to reach patients. This is still a developing region, and there are many rules and processes which need to evolve. Therefore, there is a unique opportunity to shape the region through discussions with officials.

Which are some of the industry priorities that you discuss with the authorities?

From a governmental perspective, we normally start a discussion by asking about priorities. For a country like the UAE, competitiveness is high up on the agenda. This includes discussions on how the country can become more competitive and strategizing how the UAE can be better viewed on the global stage for healthcare provision. Specifically, our members are interested in the fields of innovation, research and development (R&D) and manufacturing. There is not a recipe for how things can be done, this is a journey that takes time and will involve various benchmarks to achieve our final goal.

Could you discuss some of the key regulations shaping the pharmaceutical industry and why companies chose to establish their regional headquarters in UAE?

As a company, this is one of the most favourable business environments to operate in because the government understands the needs and the requirements of innovation. Early access to innovation is one of the key priorities for the UAE. The objective of authorities like Dr Amin Al Amiri, Under Secretary of Public Health Policy & Licensing, is to position the UAE as one of the first countries to receive medicinal products. Furthermore, the government has created an environment that provides fast access and fast registration. In addition, there is a favourable pricing system that attracts early innovation. There is a sequence that respects premium pricing and companies prioritize two types of countries. The first type is countries with a high population density, and the second type is countries that will not impact the sequence of prices. The UAE government understands this concept as an open door since a transparent policy-making process makes the business environment favourable.

Since the government has a 2030 industrial plan that focuses on local manufacturing across different sectors, what place and role can the country take on the global stage in

terms of manufacturing?

Indeed, I was recently invited to a meeting with the Dubai Chamber of Commerce where they explained that Dubai is moving toward manufacturing and the government is placing a greater focus on the area. To achieve this, over the past five years, the government has been working with top consulting companies to pinpoint exactly where they want to compete. They have decided upon six verticals: pharmaceutical, aerospace, food and beverage and three others. Another key statement they made was that they are not interested in competing with the world, the UAE is looking to compete with countries that share the same economic and demographic countries, for example, countries with low volume and high innovation. To achieve this, they will have representatives overseeing each of the six groups, including one representative from the government, a representative from the Chamber of Commerce, one from the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Health, and the Dubai Chamber of Commerce. I believe the ingredients to the UAE's success have always been listening and being razor-sharp with their vision.

Considering your extensive industry experience, what advice would you give someone that is considering entering the UAE market?

This market is open to talent and is very competitive, it is also a place where younger graduates wanting to enter need to continually sharpen their skills and educate themselves. This market is very sensitive to constant improvement and developing a skillset; it rewards people who are serious about their career. From a business point of view, it is highly transparent and very receptive to innovation.

As secretary general, what would you like to achieve at PHRMAG?

Over the past few years, we have been working on several policies and will continue working with the government to help shape further policies. There is a new angle I would like to see implemented, which is extending the reach of the association to engage a wider audience such as the Ministry of Economy, the House of IP, the Ministry of Finance or even the Ministry of Happiness. I hope we can find the capacity within the association that will allow us to engage with more institutions and create more meaningful partnerships that will benefit the patients in the region.

What motivates you personally to work with the pharmaceutical industry?

I believe the pharmaceutical industry is one of the most noble industries. I cannot think of an industry that positively affects the lives of people in the same way the pharmaceutical industry does. Our loved ones are in better health due to the medicines that have been invented by this industry. The innovation created in our industry has helped eradicate many diseases. I hope we could better illustrate and increase awareness about the achievements.

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