

Mazen Dalati - General Manager Middle East, Alcon



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28.02.2020

Tags: [UAE](#), [Alcon](#), [Medtech](#), [Ophthalmology](#), [Contact Lenses](#)

Mazen Dalati, general manager for Alcon in the Middle East, discusses the importance of the Middle East for the largest eye care company in the world, and the main changes in the region's regulatory landscape after more than 20 years of experience. Moreover, he explains why raising awareness is the main focus for the company in the region and the importance of communicating their product's benefits and capabilities to healthcare providers and end-users.

Can you introduce the company in the region and the importance of the products you provide?

Alcon is the only global eye care company with a reach from the highly technical surgical suites to consumer products like contact lenses. Alcon's purpose is to help people see brilliantly. How do we do it? By providing innovative products to enhance the quality of life by helping people see better. There is a direct connection between being able to see and quality of lifestyle; for example, when you have a cataract patient that is over 65 years old, there is a correlation between his vision condition and the number of falls. This part of the world is particularly interesting because there is a hot and harsh environment that makes the prevalence of eye diseases high, both in elderly and young people.

You mentioned that the niche of the company is quite interesting, could you explain that further?

We are a medtech company, but we also have pharma-like products like lubricants and eye drops. For more than 70 years, Alcon has focused exclusively on the eye which is one of the most sensitive organs in the body.

We are one of the largest manufacturers of contact lenses and lens care products. Our Vision Care portfolio offers a broad range of daily disposable, reusable and colour-enhancing contact lenses and a comprehensive portfolio of ocular health products for dry eye, allergies, as well as ocular vitamins and redness relievers.

On the surgical side, we offer the industry's most complete line of ophthalmic surgical products, enabling surgeons to achieve the best results for their patients. Our surgical portfolio includes technologies and devices for cataract, retinal detachments, refractive surgery, as well as advanced technology intraocular lenses (ATIOLs) to treat cataracts and refractive errors like presbyopia and astigmatism

Talking about doctors, the region has seen a lack of sub-specialist doctors. Do you agree?

Like in every region, the challenges for healthcare providers and policymakers are cost, access and quality. Access requires more doctors to be trained which allows more people to be treated. If we do not have enough doctors, people will have to wait a long time to get treated. We have seen that there is an increased focus on healthcare expenditure from the governments in the Middle East which is a good signal that non-communicable diseases are a priority. Are there enough doctors? No. There is a need to train more doctors and the medical schools are constantly working on it, we do visits to Saudi Arabia and have seen a tremendous amount of training done at university and specialty hospitals. As for quality, we will be participating as a major sponsor in EPOMEC in March, the largest eye congress in the Middle East. We want to bring the most innovative medical advancements in technology to patients.

Awareness from the public is another big focus since some local studies have shown that public awareness is very low. We believe that everyone, everywhere, should have sustainable access to quality eye care and that starts with understanding one's eye health and available treatment options.

What makes Alcon the partner of choice for stakeholders in the region?

Alcon is committed to being the preferred partner for the treatment of eye diseases. We bring the most innovative products and make them accessible; we provide training, capabilities and staff. The company has a strong presence in the region with scientific offices in Dubai, which also serves as the Middle East regional headquarters, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia that support doctors and end-users so they understand the capabilities of the technology. Partnering with distributors is key because our role in the region is to do the scientific support part, while commercial trading is done by our partners. Our role is to ensure that doctors and users are trained and using our equipment properly.

You explained the cost and access, what about the quality?

Alcon brings high-quality medical technologies to the market. As an example, to help surgeons treat retinal detachment, we provide them with very delicate devices including probes with a camera and lasers that go into and out of the eye without the need for stitches; the technology used is very advanced as the surgeons require equipment with the best access to the inside of the eye. Alcon is focused on helping doctors improve patient outcomes. We also use advanced technologies to all of our products including the consumer side business. When the lenses make contact with the eye, they are as natural as possible, essentially part of the eye. Feedback from customers and consumers has been very positive. In short, Alcon uses advanced technologies that ensure that we deliver the best possible products to patients and doctors.

Are there any particular innovations that you have introduced recently?

The latest innovation we have brought is Clareon, the first and only automated, disposable, pre-loaded IOL delivery system that enables precise delivery of the IOL into the capsular bag in patients undergoing cataract surgery. We also plan to introduce new ocular health products and new contact lenses in the Middle East.

As the largest eye care devices company in the world, how do you assess the importance of the UAE and the Middle East for the future growth of the company?

The Middle East is a very important cluster for the company since we have the ability to generate growth. The Middle East is part of the Growth and Export Markets headquartered in Geneva, and we are a key pillar for building a sustainable growth because we have seen strong opportunities due to the increase of the incidence of eye diseases; I am delighted that our headquarters is giving us plenty of support and attention.

In return, we have to ensure that we achieve sustainable growth. My priority is to strengthen our presence, our teams and win with our long-term partnerships; by partnerships I mean our distribution network and our end-users and surgeons. I believe that Alcon Middle East is well-positioned to accomplish that.

What are the main challenges that you foresee on your way to sustainable growth?

As discussed, one of the challenges is increasing eye disease awareness because, often, the healthcare system's attention goes to life-saving diseases like cardiology, oncology and diabetes. Eye surgery is seen as an elective procedure but the direct connection to morbidity and lifestyle can be overlooked.

Looking towards the future of medtech, there is great opportunity and technology will play a large role. How do you assess those opportunities in the region that you oversee??

Innovation is key for us. As far as innovative products, they will keep on coming. When we talk about artificial intelligence and knowledge, we already have products in the surgical suites that use data to help surgeons. We will be addressing the topic of innovation in EPOMEC and this clearly shows the company's commitment to the region.

After many years in the industry, what are some of the main changes you have seen since you first started?

The medical industry is changing at a fast pace in the region. When I first came to the region 20 years ago, there were no regulatory bodies. Today, we have many like the SFDA in Saudi Arabia and other authorities in the UAE, Kuwait and the rest of the countries. This change is positive because it ensures regulating the medtech product registrations and securing the introduction of

safe and high-quality products. Alcon works closely with all the regulators to ensure that our products are fully compliant with their requirements.

Another interesting development that I have seen is the privatization of the hospital sector which has started in Saudi and some countries in the GCC.

What drives you to continue working in the medical device industry?

The ability to make an impact. The medtech industry has a big impact at a personal level and I always tell my team that we are lucky to work in this business. When I tell my daughter about what we do, I see pride in her eyes. It is very demanding but satisfying.

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