Tamer Shawky – General Manager Central Region, J&J Medical Devices



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Tamer Shawky, general manager Central Region for J&J Medical Devices, shares his first expectations arriving into the region three years ago, following a successful career in the Middle East and Egypt. After managing expectations, he explains the changes they implemented internally and projects J&J has launched to increase access, with the most pioneering project aimed at reducing surgical site infection. Looking at the dynamic markets he covers, Shawky explains why he thinks the Czech Republic can close the gap on Europe, in addition to walking us through his future priorities looking forward.

Tamer, you have a long history with J&J, holding many different positions, not only at a local but also at a regional level. What were your first expectations about the Czech Republic and the CEE Region when you were first told you were coming here?

Before arriving in the Czech Republic three years ago, my whole career was in the Middle East. I started with Janssen-Cilag in Egypt, before moving to J&J Medical Devices. Growing through the ranks, I was appointed to several different positions, the last being general manager of Egypt, Pre-Transition markets and Pakistan, but stationed in Dubai.

My first thoughts were how I would fit into the local culture, which is very different from what I had previously experienced. I had never lived in the Czech Republic or even within any CEE country. So,

I wanted to understand the culture, business dynamics and more importantly win the team’s trust.

Naturally, there were a lot of questions from the team about me, who I was and what my leadership style is, especially coming from an outside region. The market in the Middle East is more dynamic with little volatility sometimes. In the Czech Republic, the market is more stable and predictable, though competitive, and more regulated. Since I am a strong believer in people, I started by listening to their thoughts, and not being particularly active in taking any decisions or making big changes until I had built a proper outlook of the healthcare system.

What would you highlight as your key milestones and achievements over the past three years?

Internally, we evolved our business model in the three countries I cover, which is the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. J&J Medical Devices has three major franchises, governed by every country manager in the country. Understanding all internal and external dynamics, with my team I discussed creating a more customer-focused approach and encouraging more collaboration across countries, opening development opportunities and sharing best practices.

Externally, we are performing consistently year on year, which is unique, although I think the growth dynamics could further increase. Additionally, we successfully implemented many of our Value Added projects that we have been negotiating for a long period of time. I am extremely proud of this achievement, as we have been successful in improving patient access in the Czech Republic, which from our Credo perspective is equally important to growing the business.

How would you characterise the Czech market?

The Czech Republic is a very advanced, mature market, regulated and properly covered by several hospitals and Healthcare Practitioners (HCPs). However, there is still room for improvement when it comes to patient access in some disease areas as well as some shortages in resources such as nurses.

Can you give our readers an introduction to J&J Medical’s local presence here in the Czech Republic?

In the Czech Republic, we are a fully-fledged J&J local operating company, offering almost everything from the global medical devices portfolio. We are directly present in the majority of our global business lines. Also, we have a very big office, called One-Prague, that represents all businesses plus Global Services, so in total there are almost 1200 J&J employees covering local and regional roles in all sectors – pharmaceuticals, medical devices and consumer products.

Some of the projects we have launched in the country are pioneering within Europe and even globally. For example, surgical site infections (SSI) are one of the hazards hospitals face and costs not only money but also has mortality rates and at some stages impacts the social life of infected patients. We entered into an innovative agreement to help these hospitals reduce SSI rates; so far, we have two hospitals that already signed agreements and they are very excited about implementing the SSI protocols. The implementation of such a complex project is not easy, as we first must assess the practices of the hospital and see what areas we can improve in terms of efficiency and safety and introduce the necessary protocols only afterwards. This is progressing very well and, since we were the first country globally to implement such a project within the J&J Group, we have teams coming from the US and China, wanting to learn more about how we implemented this initiative.

Another area which we are prioritizing is awareness campaigns for bariatric surgery. We try to tackle the low awareness in this area by approaching people directly through social media such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. It is not about convincing patients to undergo surgery for weight loss, but to educate overweight people that bariatric surgery could be one potential treatment for chronic diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Moreover, we want to explain that bariatric surgery is not an aesthetic procedure, but a surgery which can improve quality of life and treat some diseases. Our aim is to join the dots. It is important to bring together the General Practitioners (GPs) and the surgeons, along with the specialists in other therapeutic areas. We are continuing to bring experts from outside the Czech Republic to exchange knowledge and experiences with local HCPs and have held several events within the country.

Finally, there are many other projects that we are proud of in the Czech Republic, and we are partnering with the government on projects related to lung and colorectal cancer. I think this is an area for further improvement. For cancers in these areas, when treated earlier, the success rate of the treatment is very high. I am happy to see that the country is investing in screenings, and I think this is where local and central government can partner with companies like J&J.

How do you continue to communicate both the social and economic value of J&J's portfolio?

We live in a time when value is becoming increasingly important. We feel that healthcare providers should continue to think about the bigger picture and overall budget, not individual items. Medical innovations can help hospitals save costs associated with infections and delayed absences from work, among other issues. In some cases, they can help reduce morbidity and mortality

From that perspective, we will continue to partner with the government and engage with them about innovation. Our product portfolio is broad, and we are in discussions about many solutions that we have that help drive more efficiencies, especially in the operating room.

Not only do we educate and engage with the key stakeholders on a product level, but also on an efficiency level and where we can help hospitals improve efficiency. This can be achieved by implementing small changes after assessing current practices in each ward. Although these are small tips we can advise on, this can really pay off for a hospital. We have well-trained people within J&J that can analyze a hospital's day to day activities, help find solutions to save time per day, which could mean one more surgery per day, thus improving efficiency.

Healthcare systems around the world have continued pressure on their budgets. The good thing in the Czech Republic is that the country does not want to compromise on quality, so the only solution is to improve efficiency.

How would you asses the Czech Republic's ability to "Close the Gap" on Europe?

I think the Czech Republic is closer to Western than Central Europe. The country is very advanced and there is a willingness to succeed more and more. The country is economically strong and has a very well-established infrastructure. The Minister of Health Adam Vojtěch is a very ambitious leader, with big dreams for a strong healthcare system in the country. It is very easy to consider the Czech Republic as part of the Western World because of these attributes.

Looking forward, what do you have planned for J&J in 2020 and the future?

What I hope to achieve in 2020 is to ensure better access to patients for all the innovations that we provide. We have great products and great innovations. We want to make sure that everyone can benefit from them. This is a global ambition, to be achieved not just in the Czech Republic.

Locally, I am very optimistic that the country can continue to succeed and increase patient access, especially that internally we have a great team focusing on accessibility every day.

What advice would you give to a sales representative who has the ambition to follow in your career footsteps?

I think that people need to believe in themselves. Everyone needs to know that if you want to grow, nothing comes for free, there will be good moments and tough ones, but you always need to focus on moving forward.

I was fortunate to start my career in J&J, a company with a focus on people and talent development.

People should have a positive attitude and focus only on what they can do rather what they cannot.

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