Amr El-Neklawy – General Manager Middle East, North & West Africa, Afghanistan & Pakistan, Emcure



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Emcure, a fully-integrated Indian pharmaceutical company with a global presence, has invested in Dubai as an operational hub for the Middle East, North and West Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Amr El-Neklawy, Emcure's general manager for the region, explains how the company's wide product offering and culture attracted him to the project, his plan to exponentially grow their footprint in the region and the type of partner that could benefit from their assets.

You joined Emcure in February 2019 with a mission to jumpstart their regional operation. How well prepared were you for such a mission?

Although I was born and raised in the UK, I started my professional life back in 1998 with Pfizer in Egypt. About 20 years later, I did the full circle and went back to work for Pfizer but on a much different level. In the meanwhile, I went back and forth between smaller projects and large organizations for projects that required building brands or taking relatively small portfolios and make them competitive.

I have worked with Hexal, Novartis, Sandoz and Apotex. I first came to Dubai with Sandoz in 2006 to establish their subsidiary. I have had the opportunity to work for both branded and generics products along the way.

For me, the passion for doing greenfield is the excitement of creating something. It has a lot of energy associated with it, and also some personal questioning, such as “am I the right person for the project?”, or “am I up to the challenge?” Working on greenfield projects opens up your mind in terms of problem-solving, it teaches you that, often, the answers lie with others; it forces you to engage with others.

Besides, I have always found that working in the healthcare sector is of utter importance because bringing products to market in this industry can have a life or death impact. It makes a difference for patients and adds a purpose to your professional career.

What attracted you to the Emcure project in the UAE?

Emcure has a significant number of offices around the world, many of which are a result of acquisitions. Through personal connections with colleagues at the UK office, which were managing Europe, they were mandated to re-align the MENA region and for it to be a part of their portfolio. They wanted to improve their operations in the Middle East and Africa, and he introduced me. Before taking the decision to join, I started looking at what Emcure stood for and wanted to meet the people because people are what matters most in any organization.

I realized that they were ready to give whoever would take the position an opportunity for real responsibility and leeway. True empowerment is necessary when you embark on such projects.

I consulted for them for a month and came back with a working plan which they liked, soon after, they offered me the job, which I then accepted in February last year.

What I appreciated was that they seemed to accept and value diversity, they were not ideological about their approach, and seemed ready to take risks. I appreciated this philosophy of not imposing their beliefs on others.

Emcure is not big nor small, they were perfectly sized to be able to unlock growth and potential from their assets. At the same time, they are always looking at ways of delayering and improving processes, which I thought was great.

What have been your main areas of focus during this first year?

Emcure has had a direct presence in Dubai for a long time, but the office was mainly used for opportunities; they had never really invested on the people that could build a business for them. It was a trader's mentality.

In a very short amount of time, we have managed to build a very diverse team, representing the diversity of our region. Dubai gives you the possibility to find people who have the skills and mentality to cover the markets that we cater for, which are in many ways similar, but also very diverse in culture, business practices or language.

We also implemented clarity in terms of process and responsibility, something that is essential if you are going to build a long-lasting organization, if you want things to run seamless. Our idea was to build a centre of excellence to serve as a bridge between head office ideology and local realities that could unveil new opportunities. Our team is perfectly positioned for this, we know the environment because we all come from the regions were, we need to develop the business. We have managed to transform a trading unit in a decision-making hub able to unlock further opportunities.

During the first year, we have focused on the essentials: we must have the right partners, the right people, the right portfolio, the right investment mix. Of course, the final essential point is compliance. We are coming from quite low numbers and our ambition is to double our sales this year.

Which regions should drive that growth?

We have a very well-established business in the 12 countries of French-speaking West Africa, in which we operate through partners, but also with feet of the ground and the capacity to register new products. We are doing very well.

We also have a good presence in Morocco, having the right type of structure that will allow us to jump to the next level. We have also invested quite a lot in Saudi Arabia with MA registrations; we were actually able to pick up large tenders with NUPCO. Patients depend on us because we handle high-quality products that are difficult to source within oncology and nephrology, for example. Reflecting on our portfolio, we are very strong in oncology, nephrology, biosimilars, injectables which are difficult to make.

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fast. Oman is a very important country for us because we have noticed that their level of acceptance to Indian standards is very high, which is not the case everywhere, even though standards across the world are levelling.

In phase two, we will reinforce the corporate branding of Emcure, talking about what we stand for, the number of PhDs we have and the quality of our products. When working in generics, I am a strong believer that the corporate brand is much more important than product branding.

Phase three will be to look at new markets and opportunities. Countries like Algeria or Egypt cannot be left out of the plan. These are countries that have traditionally been very important markets, nevertheless, we need more time to better assess the nature of the partnership that is required to establish a successful operation.

Every time we consider a market, in parallel to identifying matching points between our portfolio and markets' needs and conditions, my priority is always is to qualify the nature of the partnership that will be needed to ensure our success in the long term. This is especially true in a place where Algeria where regulations are very strong. I am also confident that Egypt is back on the map, after the turmoil caused by the fall of the Pound.

What does Emcure offer to potential new partners?

Being in the critical care field, a highly specialized industry, the partners that we are looking for need to understand the sector and the benefits of the company. Our strength is the flexibility of our network, the fact that we are able to offer a multitude of different brands form different countries of origins. People find that very attractive. We can offer private label, to localize products or have a dual approach if it makes sense.

Another important point is the nature of the products that we have. We have some "running horses" where people can build true corporate equity around only a few very strong core products, and then build the story and access around them.

Apart from that, we are also able to offer solutions to unregistered products. Being an Indian company, we are able to tap into our network and source very difficult products that were maybe needed on a punctual basis. We can work as a one-stop-shop to provide solutions.

One of your mottos is "winning the right way." What is the right way?

For me, it is the capacity to say no. Sometimes you are approached with opportunities that you are able to do but that would force you to circumvent your own path in order to unlock them. We need to be able to refuse to that.

But Winning the Right Way also means that, when we make a commitment to someone, even if it is not in writing, we respect our word. Reputations of companies are extremely important, and they are linked to the reputation of the people who are part of them.

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