

Tarek El Rahbani - Managing Director MENA, Boston Scientific



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Working non-stop to catch up with its footprint in other regions, Boston Scientific is investing heavily in the MENA markets. Tarek El Rahbani, managing director for the region, shares the company's change in strategy, opting to have enhanced direct presence in the region. Moreover, he explains why Boston Scientific's therapies are uniquely positioned to help more patients in the MENA region and how recent decisions like the acquisition of UK-based BTG will further boost their commercial success.

You took over the position just six months ago. What attracted you to Boston Scientific?

The main reason behind my decision to join Boston Scientific was the huge potential of the company's therapies in the region and the commitment to further invest in the region. The size of the company allows us to have an agile operation, moreover, Boston Scientific enjoys a great reputation through its innovative therapies. When it comes to the medical devices industry, we are recognized for the quality of our products. In addition, the company's leadership, with Michael F. Mahoney at the helm, has put forward a clear vision with ambitious investments.

Something that I am especially proud of is the company culture; it is a caring culture that encourages the team to care about themselves and the community. I think of Boston Scientific in the region as a startup because of our dynamism and high level of energy; we feel like we are part

of a family.

What have been your main priorities since taking over?

The company has been present in the region through partners for a long time but recently started looking to have a direct presence so that our therapies and our customers receive the attention they deserve. The company understands the importance of having operations on the ground, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region because there are huge medical needs that can greatly benefit from our innovative therapies. Cardiology, to put an example, is a great opportunity for us since we are the cardiology company and cardiovascular diseases represent a big burden for the region; neuromodulation, urology, peripheral interventions and endoscopy also represent an important opportunity and we have the best solutions for them.

The possibilities in MENA are in line with our mission of helping patients and transforming lives. When we look at the needs of the region, we believe that we have the right therapies that can provide the best value for patients and payers. By bringing our therapies, we contribute to building local capabilities because we train physicians on innovative technologies, procedures and surgeries.

Can you explain Boston Scientific's current presence in the region?

Our team in the UAE is growing. The office was established a year and a half ago and is the regional headquarters. I manage the business in Middle East, North Africa, Turkey and Central Asia. We have an office in Dubai, an office in Beirut, a training center in Istanbul and a scientific office in Saudi Arabia. The future is bright, and we are looking to expand to other major markets in the region, starting with technical and scientific offices.

The company is committed to the region and trusts us to make the right decisions to expand and help customers and their patients. So far, the results have been very positive.

Has it been difficult to find enough human resources for your current operations in the region?

Not really. A nice aspect of this region is that, over the past 15 years, many multinational companies came and contributed to the development of local talent. Pharmaceutical companies paved the way and medtech companies followed by establishing a direct presence. Talking about team building, we have put an emphasis on diversity. The medical devices industry might be male-dominated in the region, but we are making a conscious effort to create equal opportunities for everyone, no matter their gender. I am also proud to say that Boston Scientific has equal parental leave for both females and males across Europe, Middle East and Africa. We care about people.

Which of your therapies are most in-demand in MENA?

Frankly speaking, all of our therapies are in high demand. We believe that the depth and breadth of our product portfolio has also enabled us to compete more effectively in the current healthcare environment that seeks to improve outcomes and lower costs. An advantage of our portfolio is the wide spectrum of therapies within each area.

The company's acquisition of UK interventional medicine company BTG last year will give us an edge and access to the interventional oncology market. We have recently completed the process of integrating BTG's commercial operations in the region.

What do you think are the main challenges and opportunities that the region has to offer for medtech players?

Looking at the market, I only see opportunities for us. MENA is made of very diverse markets, some of the richest and poorest countries, which means that in a few cases, patients do not have access to therapies because of political instability, lack of infrastructure or funding problems. There are many challenges that impact access to therapies for patients and, in order to succeed, we must build local capabilities, infrastructure, economic power, safety and security. In my opinion, raising awareness is another requisite to succeed here.

Because our therapies are very specialized, we work closely with healthcare practitioners to train them on innovative technologies and procedures. We are proud of our training and education programs and will continue to invest in them.

By 2025, the market for medical technologies in the Middle East is expected to reach USD 31.6 billion. What is the company's plan to seize on this big opportunity?

Before talking strategy, we have to understand the market. If you look at the number of patients in the region and the penetration of our therapies, you will notice that we are way behind the European or US average. In order to achieve sustained double-digit growth, we need to invest in training, education, awareness and work hand in hand with physicians to identify the right patients for the right therapies. We also must work with payers because they want to reduce costs and increase the value. Boston Scientific is putting plenty of resources to face the challenges in a smart manner and we are confident that the results will continue to come.

What has been the most fulfilling part of working in the industry?

Being able to make a difference fills me with pride, especially when it is evident that our teams and company are dedicated to transforming lives through innovative medical solutions that improve the health of patients

Not too long ago, I was travelling from South Africa and encountered a lady travelling with her mother at the security checkpoint. We were waiting to go through the metal detector when she noticed the company's name written on my bag, the daughter turned to me and said that she wanted to thank me because our company gave her mother many more years and allowed them to enjoy a holiday together in Mauritius.

Such stories are very common in our industry and one way to explain why we feel so passionate about working here.

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