

Yelda Ulu Colin - Managing Director Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Lebanon, N. Cyprus, Abbott Core Diagnostics



As a company, we were fortunate to be able to provide advanced healthcare IT systems [during the COVID-19 pandemic] that provided process optimization for users, helping manage testing more efficiently both in the private and public sectors

04.11.2021

Tags: [Turkey](#), [Abbott](#), [Abbott Diagnostics](#), [Diagnostics](#), [Medtech](#), [MENA](#)

General manager of Core Diagnostic at Abbott Turkey Yelda Ulu Colin highlights the company's prominent role during the pandemic, including the launch of the first antibody serology testing solution just one month after the World Health Organization made an official pandemic declaration. In addition, she categorizes the government's response to the emergency as "efficient" and tackles the question of workforce diversity in Turkey.

You joined Abbott Core Diagnostics as general manager for Turkey and several countries in the region in the midst of a global pandemic. Can you walk us through that decision?

With almost 27 years of healthcare market experience in Turkey and the region, Abbott approached me for this regional position around March 2020, which I found very appealing because of the company's reputation in the sector, not only in diagnostics but also in nutrition, pharmaceuticals and medical devices.

In hindsight, I am happy to have made the decision to go from imaging diagnostics to laboratory diagnostics because of the latter's role during the COVID-19 pandemic. Abbott managed to provide

key solutions due to its global surveillance program of viruses and announced its first antibody serology testing solution for COVID-19 just one month after the World Health Organization declared it a global pandemic.

I have joined a magnificent company with very good solutions and technologies but also one that pays great attention to diversity, providing opportunities to women.

What is the scope of your current responsibilities as regional manager for Abbott Diagnostics and to what extent were your ambitions limited by the COVID-19 pandemic?

I am the managing director for six countries: Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Lebanon, and Northern Cyprus. My goal is to support the healthcare systems in these countries with Abbott's highest level of technologies, services, and IT solutions.

We believe that access to healthcare is crucial in this region, which is why Abbott is trying to support healthcare professionals, governments, institutions, hospitals, laboratories, and other stakeholders. The company's role is to support the different healthcare systems with reliable technologies and diagnosis so that patients can get the best treatment; we try to help people live a healthier life.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the overall healthcare system significantly, heavily impacting the daily operations of hospitals, labs, and clinics. The number of admissions fell dramatically since people were not willing to go to the hospital, thereby impacting the number of tests and use of laboratory instrument. However, there was a big increase in demand for serology testing and I am proud to say that our products enabled the system to better manage the pandemic.

Abbott, as you mentioned, provided its first antibody serology testing solution for COVID-19 just one month after the WHO officially declared a global pandemic, but how large and fast was the adoption of your pandemic-related solutions in Turkey?

The uptake of our solutions in Turkey was wide and fast. Looking at the country's profile, we can observe that it embraces technology at a rapid speed. Just like all other multinational companies, as a pioneer in the industry, Abbott offers global solutions to the region in parallel with the US and European markets.

As a result of diverse and strong healthcare dynamics, Turkey is a special case because of the harmonious relationship between the Ministry of Health and private companies. On top of that, with the IT infrastructure available after decades of investment, the Turkish government was able to have an efficient response to pandemic. In the first stages of the pandemic, the Turkish government started using an application called HES (Hayat Eve Siğar-Life Fits Into Home) that enabled individuals to share their risk status with institutions and other individuals.

The authorities ensured that the system maximized the use of the testing capacity, including all the serology testing brought by Abbott.

As a company, we were fortunate to be able to provide advanced healthcare IT systems that provided process optimization for users, helping manage testing more efficiently both in the private and public sectors. Many hospitals shifted medical doctor visits to a virtual setting and the population responded positively.

Can you elaborate on Abbott's presence and heritage in Turkey?

Abbott has been present in Turkey for more than 30 years and its core diagnostics division, which I am leading, was the first one established. Today, the company has almost all main divisions present in the country's industrial and healthcare markets. Abbott Diagnostics has a vast presence in sales, technical service, project management and product management and all our subdivision stakeholders enjoy contact with experienced people.

As managing director, I am happy to have such a professional team that can leverage our large installed base across Turkey to provide a high level of service, including in rural areas. Abbott Turkey has ranked number one in the Top Employer list for the last three years, reflecting how the company values its employees' diversity and personal development.

One notable fact about Abbott compared to many of its competitors is that almost 40 percent of global sales come from emerging markets. As general manager of many countries under that category, what do you see as the most important trends?

All global companies understand that the healthcare needs of emerging markets require special attention because of the uneven level of access to healthcare within them. For our organization, access is about safety and quality. We believe that people in emerging markets need better access

to healthcare and we have the technology required to accomplish just that.

However, with the high levels of access thanks to the long-term investment by the authorities, Turkey holds a different position from other emerging markets. One of our current priorities in Turkey and also across the region is to support healthcare professionals through training sessions. We try to help the entire diagnostics environment, including our business partners and stakeholders, ensure that people receive accurate diagnosis and treatments.

Having many years of experience with other large multinational healthcare companies, I can say that while Abbott was born and is headquartered in the United States, it is a true global company. In every region we operate, the objective is to serve patients, healthcare professionals and local communities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our support for all markets, big and small, was enhanced; we remain focused on delivering services at a high and trustable level.

When it comes to customizing your business approach for different markets in this heterogeneous region, which model do you believe can render the best results?

Abbott's business model is different from other medical technology companies. Our organization is making big investments in capital instrument in Turkey and the region, putting trust in the healthcare system, the economy and environment. In Turkey, along with the instrument sales, we make capital expenditure (CapEx) investment; on the other hand, in the other countries within the region, taking fewer risks, we have instrument sales and sign service contracts. It is a testament to our trust in the country's future and support for local players.

You have mentioned that the level of access to healthcare in Turkey has achieved successful levels, but what about time to diagnosis (TTD)?

It is magnificent because the reply times and diagnosis cycle times are strictly defined in the public sector by tender definitions. Abbott and its business partners serving public and private hospitals must do testing in strictly defined cycles. In Turkey, the healthcare system operates within well-defined productivity KPIs, including for testing but also for doctors and nurses, set and assessed by the Ministry of Health.

Healthcare provision in Turkey is very much inclusive because the vast majority of the population is covered by the social security system. The people have access to healthcare without any

restriction, even being able to choose doctors.

Besides increasing access, what are Abbott Diagnostics' current priorities for the region you oversee?

We are currently working on an internal program related to 2025. The company is prioritizing its diagnostics services to reach and better serve more people and healthcare professionals (HCPs), which entails increasing our footprint in different countries. As previously discussed, our IT solutions are receiving increased attention due to their involvement in digitalization efforts.

In addition, Abbott is doubling down on successful initiatives that have rendered crucial outcomes such as the Global Viral Surveillance Program – of which our region is part – that has been operational since 1994. Through the program, the company has partnered with laboratories and organizations across the world to source unique patient samples, running them by research algorithms to fill in knowledge gaps, discover new and rare strains, understand local epidemiology and sharing the findings through peer reviewed journals. As an employee, I appreciate the effort because it translates into investment and knowledge.

Moreover, Abbott is helping partners transform their own internal systems; our AlinIQ IT solutions are helping them increase efficiency and productivity. All global service providers agree that healthcare IT solutions are the future and are willing to invest.

As a company with such a wide portfolio - including nutrition, diabetes, diagnostics, medical devices, and pharmaceutical generics - how do you seize on synergy opportunities within the regional organization to achieve something the company's CEO, Robert Ford, calls "One Abbott"?

That is a crucial aspect of Abbott's reality and current strategy precisely due to the diverse range of our product and service portfolio. Since we have multiple stakeholders for every division, internal collaboration and efficient use of data is a key to success. Therefore, we have periodic meetings amongst managing directors of different divisions to share information and insights, which also happen at other management levels. At the end of the day, we are serving healthcare providers that think of Abbott as One Abbott.

Speaking about an internal culture based on collaboration, how is Abbott approaching the question of workforce diversity in Turkey, a country where most of the affiliates of multinational life science companies seem to be managed by women?

Abbott Turkey is a great example of an organization that perceives diversity as a strength. The majority of our internal leadership team is led by women. At a global level, Abbott has a special organization called Woman Leaders of Abbott (WLA) which is represented by a local network in Turkey. Our objective is to increase the number of female managers and support them with mentoring. The same efforts are also underway for the talent acquisition team. I personally appreciate women leadership and would like to see the number of women increasing within the affiliate.

The fact that many women are leading global pharma affiliates in Turkey reflects the country's education system. However, I would like to see that reality replicated in the medical technology industry.

[See more interviews](#)