Myriam Hakim – General Manager GCC, Kyowa Kirin



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Myriam Hakim outlines the progress that Japanese rare disease and oncology specialist Kyowa Kirin has made in the GCC region in recent years; the importance of the Saudi market to Kyowa Kirin and its customised strategy there; as well as the main game-changers for patients in the region, namely the creation of national rare disease policies, increased awareness, and the establishment of disease registries.

Myriam, last time we spoke pre-pandemic, you were just taking over the leadership of Kyowa Kirin in the GCC region. What are the most striking developments that the organisation has witnessed since then, how have you redefined your priorities, and what do they look like today?

Indeed, last time we spoke, Kyowa Kirin was just starting to establish operations in GCC. It was a few months prior to the pandemic. The entire world has changed since then due to the pandemic.

Kyowa Kirin strives to create and deliver novel medicines with life-changing value. As a Japan-based Global Specialty Pharmaceutical Company with a more than 70-year heritage, we apply cutting-edge science including expertise in antibody research and engineering, to address the needs of patients and society across multiple therapeutic areas including Nephrology, Oncology, and Immunology/Allergy.

Our priorities remain to ensure access to our life-changing medicine, to meet the needs of the patients and society by providing value across the entire patient's pathway and retain the trust of the society while building long term trust with all our stakeholders.

We do everything we can to answer the unmet medical needs of patients, their families, and medical professionals and to do it as quickly as possible to make people smile.

In terms of trends and performance for Kyowa Kirin in the GCC, how would you characterise your region's contribution within EMEA? What are the most significant regional trends, especially in areas in which you operate like rare diseases?

GCC is one of the key cluster markets in the EMEA region within Kyowa Kirin.

It is a highly dynamic region, and changes are fast. The markets are gaining maturity mainly from regulatory, pricing and market access perspectives. Various healthcare systems have started to implement reimbursement models like the ones used in Europe, the UK, and other countries. I believe in the future HTA bodies will be in place and Health Economics and Outcomes Research (HEOR) will be used properly to help healthcare decision-makers and payers adequately compare and choose among the available options the use of such data locally is expected to change in the future in relation to access and reimbursement decision-making.

How would you assess the trajectory of your key medicines such as Crysvita in the GCC?

X-linked hypophosphatemia (XLH) is a rare genetic disease that causes abnormalities in the bones, muscles and joints and it has a lifelong burden. While symptoms of XLH can vary from one person to another, children with XLH typically experience progressive bowing of the legs, delayed growth and short stature, difficulty walking and mobility issues, bone, and joint pain due to rickets, deformity in the shape of the head (Craniosynostosis) and dental problems such as abscesses and cavities.

Crysvita has demonstrated clinical value through a robust body of clinical evidence, making a difference in the lives of patients with XLH.

We already have a few patients under treatment in KSA and the feedback we have from healthcare practitioners is very positive and it makes me feel proud to work for Kyowa Kirin, especially how access to our innovative treatments is putting a smile on patients' faces.

At Kyowa Kirin we are committed to building meaningful partnerships with the XLH community. We are working with different stakeholders when possible to improve care and support for people living with XLH and to ensure, where possible, patients who could benefit from Crysvita receive access to this new treatment option as quickly as possible.

Saudi Arabia is not only the most populous country in the GCC but also the largest healthcare market and a reference for regulatory science and pricing. How important is KSA for Kyowa Kirin and do you have a dedicated strategy to align with the country's Vision 2030 national transformation plan?

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia remains the major healthcare market in GCC for most of the players within the pharma industry and is a reference country throughout the Middle East. We have an important focus on the Saudi market and further expansion is planned from our side, strengthening our presence, expanding and growing the team while retaining and developing the talents in Saudi in a highly diverse and inclusive environment reflecting the global and regional culture at Kyowa Kirin.

We strive to contribute to the health and wellbeing of patients worldwide by discovering and commercialising highly innovative drugs, driven by state of art antibodies technology. We remain committed to ensuring access to our life-changing medicine, to meet the needs of the patients and society by providing value across the entire patient's pathway and retaining the trust of the society while building long term trust with all our stakeholders.

Our initiatives and efforts in Saudi are focused on creating and adding value through the treatment we offer in rare genetic disease and oncology areas. We do consider this aligned with the healthcare sector transformation program as well as the Vision 2030. Many aspects of the National Transformation Program (NTP) and Saudi Vision 2030 programs depend on the principle of value-based care with the aim to improve access, provide digital solutions, and improve the quality of healthcare services.

The changes are fast in the market and with all the initiatives and programs in place, it will be evolving quickly toward being more mature and elevated in terms of development, quality and services provided.

Most multinational companies work hand in hand with Saudi distributors to bring their medicines to market. What do you look for in local partners in Saudi Arabia to ensure a long-lasting and mutually beneficial partnership and how do you ensure that HCPs have the right exposure to Kyowa Kirin's current medicines and upcoming pipeline?

The go-to-market model of most multinational companies involves local distributors and partners. There is a quite good number of distributors well established in Saudi Arabia providing best in class logistics support and tailor-made services in terms of access, regulatory, sales and marketing activities and medical support.

At Kyowa Kirin, we focus on our purpose, to make people smile, and we are united by our core values of commitment to life, teamwork/Wa [a Japanese cultural concept implying a peaceful unity and conformity within a social group in which members prefer the continuation of a harmonious community over their personal interests – Ed.], innovation, and integrity. We always look to work hand in hand with our distributors as a team to ensure access to our life-changing medicine in Saudi Arabia and create value for caregivers, healthcare practitioners, healthcare organisations, nurses, and other customers so we can make patients and people smile.

We are engaging with HCPs and caregivers on several occasions and keep them updated on all the new scientific trends and available research and options relevant to the therapeutic areas we are covering, they also share with us regular feedback and advice when relevant.

On a broader level, what do you see as the "game changers" for patients in your region, especially in rare diseases and oncology?

In my view, the main game changers for patients in the region are the creation of a national rare disease policy, increased awareness, and the establishment of disease registries.

Having a national rare disease policy is a major game-changer as it is the basis to establish strategies for prevention, diagnosis management and guidelines for medications. Adding to that the investment in the centres of excellence to strengthen the research and the new technology. This will favour the regional collaboration to help and support the patients suffering from rare diseases.

On the other side the presence of registries will help improve the understanding of the prevalence, the incidence of certain rare diseases and their burden, Kyowa Kirin is investing and supporting various centres in Saudi and other GCC countries creating a registry around FGF23 related

Hypophosphatemia Rickets disorders. This is an important investment, and it will improve the local knowledge about the prevalence of these rare genetic disorders, their diagnosis and their long-term evolution and their impact on the patients and health care resources usage (HCRU).

Creating awareness and supporting education among the medical community will help to increase diagnosis and referral because early intervention is also crucial in the management of rare diseases and oncology improving patients' outcomes. Kyowa Kirin remains committed to working hand in hand with all the important stakeholders to ensure that we can continue to make patients smile.

Kyowa Kirin may be relatively new in GCC, however, the company has more than 70 years of heritage and presence in Japan. Together with the young regional talents we attract, we aim to establish Kyowa Kirin as a reference company in the core therapeutic areas of rare disease and oncology for all involved stakeholders including patients, healthcare practitioners, hospitals, policymakers, patients' organizations, and health authorities.

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