

Mohamed Mostafa - Vice President and General Manager Saudi Arabia & Egypt, IQVIA



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IQVIA Vice President and General Manager Saudi Arabia & Egypt Mohamed Mostafa gives his expert insights into the transformation of the Saudi pharma market in recent years, covering everything from procurement to regulatory, reimbursement, clinical trials, localisation, health economics, and digitalisation. Mostafa also outlines how IQVIA has adapted its Saudi offering to cater to this transformation and highlights his expectations for the Saudi pharma industry's future development.

Mohammed, could you begin by introducing yourself and your role at IQVIA today?

I have been in the industry for the last 26 years, working my way up at Pfizer and MSD before joining IQVIA in 2005. This journey began in IQVIA with the commercial team in Egypt, where I worked for five years, before becoming country manager of Saudi Arabia in 2010. Then, from 2013, I spent around a year and a half as general manager for the GCC countries, before becoming commercial director for the entire Middle East region in 2014. At the end of 2017, I moved back to Egypt as general manager of Egypt and Upper Gulf. In 2019, I took charge of IQVIA Saudi Arabia, as well as Egypt based in Riyadh.

Presumably, a lot has changed in Saudi Arabia since your first exposure to the market back in 2010. What do you see as the most significant shifts in this period and the most relevant trends today?

Significant efforts have been made over the last few years in terms of pharma and healthcare transformation, covering everything from procurement to regulatory, reimbursement, and clinical trials. We have seen an encouragement of localisation, including local manufacturing, as well as a growing emphasis on health economics and evidence generation. Digital transformation is also well underway in Saudi healthcare. Digital tools have been well utilised in the management of COVID-19 and have been an important reason why Saudi Arabia has managed the pandemic so successfully

IQVIA has different approaches in different geographies, but who are your typical clients and what are the main services that you provide in Saudi Arabia?

Until 2013, IQVIA's main focus was the pharma/life science business. However, since then, the company has moved into the healthcare sphere more broadly and has rolled out several new initiatives in collaboration with different stakeholders. In Saudi Arabia today, we work with almost all stakeholders in the healthcare ecosystem, from government to payers, healthcare providers, pharma companies, and MedTech companies, always with a focus on providing end-to-end solutions and value to our clients.

A big part of IQVIA's evolution in Saudi Arabia is around clinical trials. We are one of the few companies with a clinical trial license from the Saudi FDA and are trying to build a global/local mix of expertise to encourage greater numbers of trials to be placed in Saudi Arabia moving forward, which is an area of high unmet need. Additionally, we are providing our digital solutions to pharma and MedTech companies as well as the government and are part of several national implementations in insurance, Hospital Information System (HIS), electronic medical records (EMR), and patient costing solution. We understand the healthcare system well, are very plugged into it, and are therefore in a great position to help our clients.

Vision 2030 promises to transform the entire Saudi economy and society, with a big emphasis on healthcare. From your perspective, how transformational can this project be?

Vision 2030 is an excellent example of an overarching national strategy which covers all healthcare needs via a plethora of initiatives. The Vision has already pushed Saudi Arabia ahead of many other countries in terms of healthcare transformation. IQVIA is adapting its own directions in line with Vision 2030 by investing in building talent and supporting clinical, digital & evidence generation.

How have the Saudisation requirements around local content impacted the Saudi pharma industry?

Speaking about IQVIA, five or six years ago, we had very few Saudi staff. However, today, around half of our team members are Saudis. This is not just about meeting the Saudisation requirements, but more about having robust and well qualified Saudi colleagues at all levels.

As part of this, we are building a clinical research associate (CRA) school, offering certified six-month training programs for newly educated Saudi pharmacists and physicians before they enter the market and can be nuclei for clinical research or clinical trials.

There is great adaptive and hardworking talent in Saudi Arabia, on the junior, mid, and senior levels, which we need to find and leverage.

As IQVIA is one of the few companies with a clinical trial license in Saudi Arabia, how would you assess the Kingdom's current clinical trials output and its potential as a clinical trials hub for the region?

Saudi Arabia is the largest pharma market in the region. Most globally available innovative products are also available in Saudi Arabia and the Saudi authorities are very keen on bringing in innovation. New regulations promoting early access are increasing these products' availability and creating a good environment for clinical research. Today, most clinical trials involve specialty/rare disease products, so Saudi Arabia has a good opportunity to become a regional clinical research hub. Promoting more clinical trials is also a key element of Vision 2030 as it will also create new jobs and generate revenue for the country.

IQVIA has invested lots of resources to create a local clinical trials hub. We are now able to offer our services by leveraging the knowledge we get from our global presence.

As increasing numbers of expensive therapies in areas like cell and gene come online, real-world evidence (RWE) studies are becoming more important to prove these products' efficiency. What is the status of these studies in Saudi Arabia today and do you see them as an important piece moving forward?

RWE and data generation is one of the most important evolutions happening in Saudi Arabia today and IQVIA is proud to be running multiple Phase IV and post-launch RWE studies here. The generation of local data and insights into the use of medicines – either from a safety, efficacy, or cost-effectiveness perspective – is becoming a must, and a lot of work is being put into it from both the government and industry sides. As greater understanding emerges of how different medicines affect different populations with different genetic makeups, local data generation has become key.

Value-based medicine is an important element of Saudi Arabia's healthcare transformation, but is the country fully ready to embrace it yet?

Great progress has been made towards value-based healthcare in recent years; progress which is likely to continue. Saudi Arabia is a regional leader in this field and other countries are beginning to take it as a reference and model to be replicated elsewhere, translating theory into action.

In terms of digital infrastructure, how mature is Saudi Arabia and what do you see as the main digitalisation trends currently underway in the Kingdom?

Saudi Arabia is one of the most digitally mature countries in terms of infrastructure in the region. Even prior to COVID-19, there was a high penetration of digital tools among the population and a great deal of connectivity. COVID-19 showed that the country was well able to cope with switching to digital, especially in healthcare. We saw greater digitalisation of the country's hospitals, and digital patient-physician interactions via teleconsultation were well utilised. There has been a lot of digital evolution across several areas, and IQVIA is proud to support the continuing national digital transformation.

Do you see this telehealth trend continuing post-COVID, especially considering the size of Saudi Arabia and the difficulties of accessing rural or remote populations?

Teleconsultation and telehealth are continuously evolving. Most hospital providers have started to build their own applications to reach more patients, especially in rural areas, and to better ensure patient safety. Additionally, we are beginning to see a trend towards home care, another evolving need in Saudi Arabia. Thirdly, there is now a greater focus on using digital tools for patient education and support.

What gives you the most excitement about working for IQVIA in Saudi Arabia today?

I have been at IQVIA for 16 years. At this company, I have been exposed to multiple countries across the Middle East, which has been fantastic, and every day I learn something new.

Looking at how the company has evolved in my time from just providing data into research, consulting, analytics, healthcare, digital solutions, and RWE, working with different stakeholders, gives you an idea of IQVIA's dynamism and myriad learning opportunities.

Finally, I am always excited to work because we genuinely add value for our clients, for the country, and for its people.

Do you have a final message for PharmaBoardroom's international audience on Saudi Arabia and its opportunities?

Saudi Arabia has a uniquely strong position, given the size of its population and the increase in investments in healthcare and pharma space. We have seen several multinational companies making big investments to localise in Saudi Arabia as well as the rapid evolution of local Saudi companies, and the market will continue to grow. There are plenty of opportunities here for players that can show agility and innovation.

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