

Marwan Abdulaziz Janahi - Managing Director, Dubai Science Park



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The Managing Director of Dubai Science Park (DSP), Marwan Abdulaziz Janahi, comments on Dubai's success in becoming a regional hub for life sciences companies, the challenging reality of localizing high-tech manufacturing, and the move towards specialized centers of excellence within Dubai's hospital infrastructure.

Can you start by introducing Dubai Science Park and how you became involved with it?

I joined Dubai Science Park - which was at that time known by another name - as a junior business developer in 2007 and rose up the ranks in alignment with the business district's own growth journey. When I first joined, we had 20-25 companies and now we have over 400.

As our contribution to the industry expanded, we began collaborating closely with the government and I was appointed chairman of the Pharma and MedTech Manufacturing Committee in 2018, charged with the responsibility of helping make Dubai an attractive destination for manufacturing and industrial activities. Today, the industry truly values what we do at DSP.

Dubai Science Park accommodates a wide range of science-based businesses and organizations, including pharmaceuticals, medical technology, biotechnology, digital

health, and renewable energy. How difficult is it to remain focused with such a multidisciplinary approach?

These disciplines are all interconnected, and science-based, which is what makes DSP such a comprehensive and collaboration-ready community. The business district offers sufficient space to grow and accommodate different sectors, while maintaining a strong presence in the sectors in which we currently operate.

Within healthcare, DSP started with biotech, then expanded into pharma and medical technology and equipment. Our other areas of interest include digital health and renewable energy.

The objective is to consolidate a strong and diverse business ecosystem by working with companies, hosting events, and bringing people together to share insights and facilitate partnerships. The community DSP is building comprises global companies as well as startups and we offer opportunities to companies regardless of where they are in the value chain, which is one of our key advantages; the district is geared towards meeting and adapting to their needs, including regulations, policies, investment, and talent.

There is a strong desire from countries in the region to offer companies more than just a market to sell their products, asking them to localize part of the production process. What has been your experience so far dealing with this issue considering that the UAE is not such a large market in terms of population?

Expanding the local manufacturing sector is a key priority of the UAE government – and that of many governments around the region – and we should be mindful of what we can achieve.

We know that sophisticated high-tech manufacturing requires a very particular set of conditions on the ground, and we are not asking for them to be relocated today. We are saying that the UAE must leverage its current strengths, just as it has done in logistics with Emirates Airlines which, for example, handles 80 percent of India's pharma manufacturing.

The strategy in place aims to start with less complicated sectors such as generics before exploring more complex sectors. The country already has about 15 production plants with five more on the way. In this sense, COVID-19 played a big role because the UAE has been producing therapeutics and vaccines for neighboring countries.

In terms of facilitating help in regulatory affairs, we have signed an MoU with the Ministry of Health to facilitate a lot of the activities of pharma companies and they have offered great support,

especially with innovation. This shows in the fact that the UAE is one of the first markets globally where innovative healthcare products are launched after FDA or EMA approval. The UAE is pro-innovation which enables companies to operate with few hurdles.

Arab Health 2022 had a strong component of digitalisation. How advanced is Dubai in that area and what opportunities are currently available?

Dubai Science Park is very active in the digital health sector, especially after a new regulation was passed in 2020 that addressed patient privacy concerns. We worked with other stakeholders to get clarity on the grey areas, and this has resulted in increased investment in digital health, more so after the pandemic simply because people adopted tele-medicine, tele-pharmacy and other services. Moving forward, solutions like remote care will grow in practice because they serve to benefit both public and private hospitals.

EMR (electronic medical records) are very well established in the country and sharing between the government and private organizations has increased. As such, plenty of investment has been made in digital health infrastructure.

Another big topic at Arab Health 2022 was the promotion of the hospital infrastructure in Dubai and across the region. Where do we stand today on this point?

What is happening now in terms of hospital infrastructure is a move to specialization and centres of excellence such as cancer, ophthalmology, or children's hospitals. This trend is perhaps one of the reasons behind the rise of medical tourism in the UAE. I do not believe that we need more general hospitals.

Within DSP we have the Neuro Spinal Hospital which opened last year and represented an investment of around USD 190 million. It offers technological solutions and treatments that are not available elsewhere in the region and will play a significant role in training medical talent in the region.

The United States remains the largest healthcare market in the world and has proven that success in the industry does not happen overnight. What do you think that,

collectively, you have learned about their journey?

It has been a very interesting journey for sure and we have learned a lot from our colleagues in the United States and Europe. In recent years we have observed many companies expanding their activities beyond marketing to include manufacturing, storage and clinical trials, which is something that the country needs in order to further strengthen its competitiveness.

With the understanding that accessibility to talent is key, Dubai is investing in nurturing local talent and pursuing partnerships to that effect with universities such as NYU and Birmingham University. Moreover, Dubai has been able to position itself as a melting pot with more than 200 nationalities by offering lifestyle choices for a wide range of people from Europe, the US, Asia, and Africa.

The government's stability and long-term vision have been integral to Dubai's success in connecting and keeping up with other markets. On the other hand, there is work to be done in terms of offering investment opportunities to smaller companies and startups, which In5, an enabling platform for start-ups, is working to improve.

Can you comment on your position as chairman of the UAE Rare Disease Society and its role in helping patients?

I was initially invited to join as a member of the board, and they later elected me to serve as chairman. While I already juggle many responsibilities, I was delighted that they gave me the opportunity to be on the front line of such a great cause and work with patients directly. This is my first time interacting with patients - or as we call them, heroes - because they are truly fighting against difficult diseases along with their families. Many of them are kids that do not understand their condition and the journey ahead of them.

The UAE Rare Disease Society engages in many activities to raise awareness among doctors because sometimes even doctors do not know how to detect or treat rare diseases. Identifying symptoms is crucial because rare diseases, globally, take an average of 6-7 years to be diagnosed. Fighting stigma is also an important priority.

Is there a final message you would like to share with our audience?

Dubai continues to reinvent itself on both an annual and even monthly basis, working to attract more companies and bright, entrepreneurial minds. The Emirate has adapted its policies and

invested in specific sectors through initiatives like Dubai Science Park, which not only boasts an extensive community of international companies, SMEs and start-ups driving innovation and scientific advancement, but also embodies a deep understanding of the sector. It offers companies a place they can call home as they expand their operations across the region from the UAE.

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