

Ahmed El-Shazly – General Manager, Pfizer Egypt



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29.09.2022

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Pfizer's general manager for Egypt, Ahmed El-Shazly, comments on his return to Egypt after 19 years away, the significant opportunities ahead for the affiliate as it looks to find its place within the country's healthcare transformation, and the noteworthy MoU signed with the government to potentially localise the production of its pneumococcal conjugate vaccine for children.

Ahmed, you have been with Pfizer for many years and are just coming back after 19 years to lead your home country affiliate. Can you comment on what has motivated you to take the general manager role?

It is an exciting assignment. Coming back to Egypt after 19 years, I cannot help but appreciate the differences and how things have changed. You can see the difference in the streets, the culture, and the people's motivation to succeed, deliver and lead by example. We are hearing about Egypt's collaboration within Africa, and its vision to establish Africa as a continental hub for trade and innovation.

I previously had a regional role for Africa and the Middle East, so when the opportunity came to be general manager of Egypt, I took it. It is a chance for me to give back to my country; I want to be part of the success story of healthcare in Egypt at this very important time.

In parallel, I have been at Pfizer for 20 years and the transformation that the company is going through is also very exciting. Pfizer is shifting from a diversified company with a consumer health portfolio and comprehensive portfolio of legacy brands to a more science-focused biopharmaceutical powerhouse. As part of that transformation, one of our core priorities is promoting innovation which is coming in the way and speed in delivering our business and breakthroughs we are bringing to market driven by patient needs. It is important the company shares the country's aspiration to transform, improve and lead. Speaking with government officials, it is visible that we share common ground. Enhancing access to innovation is a priority for them and for us.

Moreover, Pfizer is focused on the digitalisation piece and would like to help the government which in turn sees it as a core competency for the evolution of the country. We are collaborating on that front to enhance the entire patient journey.

Last but not least, we understand that many countries are looking at localisation. Pfizer is taking a different approach and looking to translate technology capabilities because bringing innovation is about bringing capabilities. In this regard, we just signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Egyptian Ministry of Health (MoH) to explore the potential local production of our pneumococcal conjugate vaccines.

What type of organisation did you find upon arrival and what sort of footprint does the company have in Egypt?

At Pfizer, all our work is fundamentally underlined by our mission to deliver breakthroughs that change patients' lives. That dictates all our work globally, including in Egypt, where for the past 60 years, we have been working with healthcare professionals, communities, and the government to that end.

As an organisation, we have brought forward a comprehensive portfolio that includes oncology products, vaccines, inflammation and immunology, and rare diseases. It is a very specialised, innovative, and science-driven portfolio. The execution of the Egyptian organisation has been amazing. On top of that, I encountered a good culture within, including over 150 people eager to be successful and lead.

Unlike in the global rankings, Pfizer is not one of the top five largest companies in Egypt. How do you intend to change this?

At Pfizer, we remain committed and steadfast in our mission to deliver breakthroughs that change patients' lives and improving patient access and affordability are our most significant objectives. and the pandemic was a clear example of this commitment. That is why my first priority after arriving in Egypt was to ensure patients continue having access to our medications. For instance, in Egypt we have more than 1,300 patients benefiting from Pfizer's patient support access programs; mostly those suffering from cancer, rheumatoid diseases, as well as those hospitalised in ICUs. And we will continue working closely with government and local partners to identify the gaps in the patient journey and address them.

I remain optimistic after a few visits to the authorities because there is great awareness of the importance and the value that every stakeholder can bring. Fortunately, Pfizer does not only provide innovation and medicines, but it also provides value around the medicine such as awareness, test to treat, and the government is starting to accept that fact. They understand that in order to avoid rising

healthcare expenditure, patients must adhere to treatments.

The Egyptian market is a key priority for Pfizer. We remain deeply committed to bringing global and local innovations to further develop and support our healthcare system here and being part of this exciting journey as Egypt country manager comes with a great deal of pride.

Can you outline the significance of Pfizer's recent MoU with the Egyptian MoH to locally produce the company's pneumococcal conjugate vaccine?

As the COVID-19 pandemic showed, prevention and treatment are equally crucial in fighting threats to global health. Pfizer has long been committed to these two goals, and we have been pleased to see that the Egyptian government shares this long-term commitment.

This crucial vaccine is given to children – the future of any country – and the Egyptian MoH recognises the importance of eventually being able to produce it domestically. The recent MoU that explores potential collaboration signals a willingness on the part of Pfizer to help meet this ambition, looking into the feasibility of doing technology transfer and finding the right local partners that adhere to our rigorous global quality standards.

All of this reflects the importance of Egypt as a leading country within the MEA region, as well as its importance to Pfizer globally. For context, Egypt has a population of over 100 million today – a number that will rise to 160 million by 2050 –, an economy that is growing by 5.5 percent despite the COVID-19 pandemic, and governmental authorities eager to speedily absorb innovative products that contribute to the nation's health.

You mentioned digitalisation as an important part of your strategy. How can the government realistically create a digitalised healthcare system and patient journey that works for patients and creates value?

Healthcare is going through a major shift as new innovations in medicines and lifesaving procedures are being brought to patients. Much of what we are seeing help drive this innovation is in the digital space. Collaborations between public and private organisations (public-private partnerships) are a powerful tool to support innovation and growth in the digital space.

For Pfizer, technology has a profound impact on the way we conduct our research, provide healthcare information as well as support patients on our medicines. As part of this work, we have set out on a digital transformation journey that will enhance every aspect of our business to ensure delivering our breakthroughs to patients as quickly as we can and ultimately improving health outcomes.

As part of our efforts, in Egypt we have recently partnered with the General Authority for Health Care (GAHC) in launching the Decision Support Unit (DSU) Program kicking off a strategic partnership and key milestone in digital healthcare transformation, with the goal to enhance the patient journey and experience, and support data generation and deployment for evidence-based decision-making.

How does scientific progress look in Egypt in terms of clinical trials and how is Pfizer contributing?

We have witnessed the great government efforts in creating a governance framework for Clinical research in Egypt and weâ??d like to acknowledge the great governmental efforts in issuing the new law. Pfizer is always proud to support the local efforts to provide the most exemplary healthcare system, that is why, for the last years we focused on three main pillars: Enhancing patient journey, access to innovation, and providing meaningful partnerships and the priority for Pfizer right now is to support Egypt with its Vision 2030. Within that view, we are focusing on three pillars: access, digitalisation and localisation. I have shared previously some examples of our partnerships supporting those pillars.

What is your approach to diversity, inclusion, and developing talent?

At Pfizer, we have a diversified and inclusive work environment that acknowledges and rewards both performance and leadership, empowering all employees to bring their best selves to work for the benefit of our patients. Take me as an example, I started my career with Pfizer as a medical rep in 2001 and came back as a general manager. My career journey reflects Pfizerâ??s internal desire to promote diversity, inclusion and lateral moves to different parts of the organisation. This matters because you can better anticipate problems if you have been exposed to diverse perspectives and systems. Pfizer is making a conscious effort to attract talent with different backgrounds.

Because of our efforts, Pfizer was recognized as a â??Top Employerâ?• for three years in a row. Moreover, in 2021, the Universum Talent Research Survey also gave Pfizer Egypt an ideal employer rating of 22.50%, up from 15.98% in 2020, reflecting the companyâ??s ongoing internal developments efforts in various areas.

What about the leadership role that Egypt wants to have on the African continent?

Egypt is aiming to complement and collaborate more with the African countries through a clear vision to establish Africa as a continental hub for health innovation and trade. And we all witnessed the most recent success of Africa Health ExCon under the patronage of HE the President of Egypt and endorsed by UPA which will be an annual forum to create a sustainable platform to connect healthcare partners under one roof. It is an opportunity for all countries and companies to share their experiences and ideas, to have a future well-integrated plan.

Is there a final message you would like to send to our international audience?

I want to underscore that Pfizer believes in prevention, and envisions a future where disease doesnâ??t win, but science does. Patients come first and we are here to ensure equitable access where every patient, regardless of where they live, will have access to life-saving medicines, treatments, and vaccines. I am very proud to be in Pfizer and here in the region during these exciting times.

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