

Ana Raposo – Country Director Gulf Countries, Janssen



The Gulf markets are very open to innovation and eager to bring the most cutting-edge products to the region

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Ana Raposo, country director for Gulf Countries at Janssen discusses her role, the main similarities and differences between the various markets throughout the Gulf, mental health, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives in the region.

Being fairly new as a country director, how challenging was it to embrace this new position in terms of a new scope of responsibilities, as well as markets to look after?

Throughout my career, I have experienced several changes between my various roles. For example, I've operated across many disciplines from medical affairs to business operations, marketing, market access, and sales. Changing roles and functions tend to be more the norm, therefore, it did not come as a surprise in having to adapt for different requirements.

However, I found entering a more sales-oriented position (which is largely what my current position comprises of) extremely refreshing, as it is the posting I have had that allows me to become the most involved in the market, customers, and teams we have in the field. Furthermore, this position has allowed me to understand both marketing and customer needs, as well as interacting with teams on a daily basis to appreciate the struggles they go through.

My first experience working in the Emerging Markets was in my previous role looking after Near East, Maghreb and Africa, and this was a change from the more established markets I was used to. Furthermore, working in Emerging Markets have been some of the most exciting times I have experienced throughout my career. It has allowed me to develop both personally and professionally, as one learns to become more agile and creative in solving problems.

Since you started the position in July 2018, what have been some of your key learnings?

The key takeaway has been to expect the unexpected. Although I have been working in the Emerging Markets for a while, it was a vastly different experience leading the Near East, Maghreb and Africa compared to the Gulf region. The Gulf markets are very open to innovation and eager to bring the most cutting-edge products to the region. Thus, Janssen's main focus in the region is transformational medicine and bringing the highest level of innovations to the market. In terms of access to medicines, it is similar to western markets, however, due to the developing regulations, companies are able to be part of shaping of pharmaceutical regulations and we focus a great deal on collaborating with our stakeholders.

Looking at the various markets across the Gulf, what are some of the main differences and similarities you have dealt with?

The Gulf countries exhibit similar behaviours across the region, and they have a fairly high GDP and purchasing power. The main differences are in the way they manage their healthcare budgets. One of the most differentiated markets for Janssen is, in fact, the UAE, as the private sector represents a significant part of our business. Whilst many of the other markets are government tender based, therefore, the way in which a company brings a product to market in these countries is tailored accordingly. What is interesting is the fluctuations in the extent to which governments interact with each other in the region. For example, at one point there was a strong intention to bring a consistent set of regulations and prices across the GCC. However, although the direction is still the same, this progress seems to be slowing at the moment.

What is Janssen's footprint within the Gulf countries and how well have the Gulf countries been performing in 2019?

Janssen has an operational hub in the UAE and a scientific office in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), in all other markets we work through our distributors. These countries are highly dependent on oil prices and it follows a similar trend for the majority of businesses operating in these countries. More recently, Qatar and Kuwait are expected to have solid growth, however, we are seeing a more balanced trend of growth in the UAE. For Janssen specifically, due to our portfolio offering being highly differentiated, including transformational medical innovation, we have seen strong growth across the Gulf which is great news.

What are some of Janssen's best-performing products and key therapeutic areas driving growth in the region?

For the Gulf market, our major therapy area of focus is immunology. Within immunology, we cover dermatology, gastroenterology, and rheumatology. Our other areas are onco-haematology, neurosciences and pulmonary arterial hypertension (PAH). STELARA® continues to be one of our fastest-growing products, particularly in Gastroenterology with the launch in Crohn's Disease where there is a significant need for new treatments. REMICADE® is still experiencing solid performance and is a significant portion of our business.

Furthermore, over the last two years we have launched five new products and recently brought out a new IL-23 therapy in dermatology TREMFYA®, which gives new options for patients and HCPs. I am happy to say that we are launching at the same pace as both the US and Europe which is extremely refreshing. Finally, three other products we have launched are TREVICTA® in schizophrenia, DARZALEX® for multiple myeloma and UPTRAVI® for PAH (in the UAE).

How would you assess the ease of launching these products in the UAE?

The response from doctors in welcoming innovation has been brilliant. In some cases, during our launches, we have witnessed an adoption rate that is faster than some European markets, which was the case with TREMFYA®, for example. Given the demographics and it being a younger population with a high proportion of expats, we see less demand in onco-haematology compared to markets with older populations or compared to the immunology portfolio, however, when one compares the like-for-like there is a fast uptake across all innovative brands.

What areas of improvement would you like to see in order to bring new innovative products to the market?

The pressure is certainly increasing concerning sustainability in the healthcare system. As an innovative company, we also want to be part of identifying innovative solutions to healthcare needs and access challenges. More often than not the discussion revolves around the direct cost of adding a new product, and there remains a lack of health economic models that demonstrate and assess the value a product is bringing to the market. This can make our value proposition more difficult and as we look to remain for the long term, we want a healthcare system that is sustainable.

Are there any innovations you are excited to bring over the coming years?

Yes! We will be launching a new product this year and another in early 2020. Our newest product is for prostate cancer and early next year we hope to launch a product in the area of depression.

On the subject of depression, how does Janssen view mental health in the region?

There is a great deal of stigma around the subject of mental health globally, especially in the area of schizophrenia where we have a long legacy. We work closely with healthcare professionals and with the governments in partnering to develop training programs and increase education on disease awareness in mental health. Furthermore, we have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Ministry of Health and Prevention in the UAE, where we have agreed to collaborate in bringing education for healthcare professionals, as well as increase awareness and work to decrease stigma

in the general population.

Can you highlight some of the awareness and CSR initiatives you are currently working on?

One of our critical success factors and strategic drivers is a patient focus and ensuring there is adequate patient access. This derives from two key areas: Firstly, there are many support programs for patients who are taking our products, such as, nursing support and nursing education. Furthermore, we have affordability and co-payment programs for patients who are in the private sector where medication costs are not fully covered and patients cannot afford; we create special schemes to ensure they can still benefit from access to the medication. The second area we are focused on is disease awareness, where for example, we have been involved in programs, such as the recent psoriasis awareness campaign for World Psoriasis Day in association with the Emirates Society for Dermatology, including the Psoriasis Walkathon, social media campaigns and interviews to create greater awareness.

What qualities do you feel are the most needed to be successful in the GCC?

Working in Emerging Markets, one must be flexible in adapting to changes. It is also important to be externally driven and externally focused, as fortunately, these markets are prone to partnering with those keeping the best interest for the sake of the patients. It is always important to have the patient's best interests at heart and, as aforementioned, these markets are very welcoming to innovation, therefore, businesses need to ensure they are forward-looking.

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