

Hatem Werdany - Country President, AstraZeneca Egypt



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Country President, Hatem Werdany, provides an overview of AstraZeneca's 50+ year legacy in Egypt and outlines the company's plans to launch up to 25 new products there over the next three years in areas such as respiratory disease and breast cancer, and its intention to expand local manufacturing capabilities. He also weighs in on Egypt's new HTA market access model and the 2020 clinical research law aimed at capitalizing on the nation's potential for clinical trials.

Hatem, can you give us an overview of your career before arriving at the helm of AstraZeneca Egypt?

With over 20 years of experience in pharma, I have built extensive and diversified experience across different geographies, as well as held a variety of roles in areas such as marketing, corporate affairs, and sales management.

For the last six years, I have worked at AstraZeneca where I spent two years at the UK headquarters leading the cardiovascular, renal, and metabolism therapy area across different markets.

Now with my position as the Country President of AstraZeneca Egypt, I have been leading the organization for the past 3 year and witnessing the transformation of the healthcare system in the country. It's important for me to lead a company that shares our country's vision, which translates into strong and sustainable public-private collaboration to ensure our patients have access to innovative treatments.

I am also honoured to be elected as the Vice Chairman for the PhRMA Group in Egypt. This platform provides me with the opportunity to serve the collective efforts of the pharmaceutical industry in paving the way towards a stronger healthcare ecosystem for our patients.

How did you find the AstraZeneca Egypt affiliate in when you returned to the country in January 2020 and how has it evolved since then?

AstraZeneca has been present in Egypt for more than 50 years and has had a manufacturing site in the country for over 15 years. We have a strong footprint in the Egyptian market and supply innovative medicines for patients with chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular, renal, and respiratory diseases, as well as oncology.

Over the past two years, AstraZeneca has become one of the fastest growing multinational companies in the Egyptian market and has steadily climbed the industry rankings, thereby proving the efficacy of our transformation strategy. Additionally, AstraZeneca has been heavily involved in Egypt's fight against COVID-19, having brought our vaccine to the country in January 2021, just one month after it was first launched in the UK. We have also launched a prophylaxis against COVID-19 for immunocompromised patients to protect them from the virus.

The company's pipeline is rich with new products. Over the next three years, we anticipate the launch of as many as 25 new products and new indications. Moreover, AstraZeneca is looking to expand its local manufacturing footprint in Egypt by over 50 percent, in line with the government's goals with respect to manufacturing localisation and technology transfer.

Is this flurry of new product and indication registrations due to Egypt now having a more amenable regulatory body than before?

The Egyptian healthcare system has undergone significant reform with the implementation of several new regulations, including the creation of the Egyptian Drug Authority (EDA). This has accelerated the speed at which new innovations can be registered and brought to the market in the country. In addition to this, the government's support for healthcare entities has significantly improved, demonstrated by a 20 percent increase in the healthcare budget over the past 3 years. The Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi is strengthening the healthcare system to better serve the Egyptian people by launching a number of presidential campaigns that target important issues and raise awareness across society. All of these developments are conducive to AstraZeneca's growth and allow us to be a true strategic partner for the Egyptian government and bring innovation to the country.

Which areas will the company's 25 new Egyptian launches over the next three years be primarily focused on?

We have a strong focus on biologics, with products coming online in respiratory disease such as severe asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Additionally, we are committed to bringing innovative medicines to patients with breast cancer - also an area of focus for the Egyptian government, which has been putting considerable effort into raising awareness of prevention and treatment.

Does the Egyptian market's newfound dynamism require new talent profiles and ways of thinking within your team?

Definitely. Egypt as a country is moving at high speed, with lots of new projects and a high demand for innovation, which we need to match as a company. Globally AstraZeneca is also changing rapidly. Acceleration is the name of the game and everything we do is aimed at bringing our innovative medicines to Egypt as quickly as possible and becoming more agile and digitalised as we do so.

How is AstraZeneca defining digital transformation in Egypt?

We are taking an integrated and comprehensive approach, for example in the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the diagnosis of lung cancer patients. This has helped to reach a wider pool of patients from across the healthcare ecosystem and diagnose them earlier and more accurately.

E-commerce is another area we are now moving into boldly. AstraZeneca has partnered with a technology start-up in this field to facilitate the sale of medicine online, reflecting the new reality that current generations prefer the convenience of online platforms to access and fulfil their needs. We expect this to catch on in pharma very soon.

With big pharma companies like AstraZeneca shifting away from their legacy portfolios towards areas like oncology and rare diseases, do you feel confident that Egypt even with its healthcare transformation has the will, infrastructure, and level of investment necessary to absorb the new innovations that will be coming forward in the next few years?

Yes. We have witnessed the efforts that the Egyptian Government has put in place to endorse access to innovative medicines in areas like oncology and rare diseases, as demonstrated by the ongoing presidential campaigns as well as the new reforms that have been put in place.

For this to come to fruition, a new market access model using health technology assessment (HTA) is being implemented. Cost effectiveness of medicines to local populations, for example, is now becoming part of the discussion. Companies like AstraZeneca along with our colleagues in the local pharma industry association need to support this with data generation and management to ensure the success of an HTA system in Egypt. Moreover, the clinical research law approved by parliament in December, 2020 will facilitate a greater number of clinical studies in Egypt, which will create the potential for the country to become a clinical research hub for the region thanks to its infrastructure, doctors, and patients. A door could open for companies to base more Phase III trials in Egypt and generate real-world evidence to prove the effectiveness of new medicines and how they can help patients.

What is the business case for scaling up AstraZeneca's manufacturing facilities by 50 percent in Egypt?

That's a good question. Firstly, it is important to remember that Egypt is a big country and that it already acts as a hub for Africa, and it also has the potential to do so for the entire Middle East.

AstraZeneca has a strong heritage in the local manufacture of medicines that stretches over decades. Secondly, manufacturing and workforce costs are much lower in Egypt than in Europe, thereby creating significant savings. Thirdly, the regulatory framework is increasingly favourable to local manufacturing, in line with the government's healthcare transformation goals. Local companies are already taking advantage of this environment and multinationals should also take note.

What changes could make Egypt a more compelling life sciences investment destination in the region?

The clinical trials regulations that already exist need to be enacted and cascaded down throughout the system.

As mentioned before, the domestic market is lower in cost than in Europe and it is the lowest in the region, which impinges on the potential and our ability to become internationally competitive.

Given the role that companies like AstraZeneca have played in fighting the pandemic, do you feel that there has been a reassessment of what the industry can offer with respect to achieving national healthcare goals?

Certainly. The government listens to the experiences of multinational companies more and I have attended several meetings with the authorities where public-private partnerships (PPPs) are high on the agenda. The Egyptian government is now much more welcoming to the private sector and willing to capitalise on its know-how. There are greater levels of transparency and an understanding that we are all working towards similar goals. Egypt's Vision 2030 transformation plan envisages universal health insurance, meaning access for the entire Egyptian population, regardless of their income level. This is a dream we at AstraZeneca share.

Sustainability is an increasingly important piece of multinationals' operations. What does sustainability mean to AstraZeneca Egypt?

Sustainability for us means healthy people, a healthy society, and a healthy planet. We believe that the three are interconnected because we thrive as humans when the planet is thriving as well. In line with this vision, we have set up a sustainability strategy based on three main pillars. The first is access to healthcare for everyone. The second is environmental protection, which we are boldly taking actions towards in terms of decarbonisation by committing to a zero-carbon emission manufacturing and supply chain. The third is ethics and transparency.

In partnership with the government, AstraZeneca has undertaken several initiatives around green healthcare. For instance, we signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the General Authority for Healthcare Accreditation and Regulation of Egypt (GAHAR) to increase awareness on green standards in hospitals. Several other such initiatives will be taking place in the run up to the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27), taking place in Egypt this November.

We are also committed to educating younger generations. Our 'Young Health Programme', in partnership with Plan International and with the endorsement of five Egyptian ministries, targets over 700,000 young people aged between 15 and 24. It looks at behavioural change around health,

protection against non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and raising awareness about environmental protection.

A final important collaboration on sustainability is the Partnership for Health System Sustainability and Resilience (PHSSR). Initiated by the London School of Economics (LSE), the World Economic Forum (WEF) and AstraZeneca in 2020; the PHSSR is motivated by a shared commitment to improve population health throughout and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring that health systems are resilient enough to withstand future crises. This covers new guidelines, protocols, digitalisation, infrastructure upgrades, doctors's training, and much more.

Do you have any final message for PharmaBoardroom's international audience?

We have confidence in the Egyptian government's direction with respect to healthcare, and we offer our full support and look forward to maintaining a long-term partnership for the benefit of Egyptian society. This has always been our vision and part of our DNA as a patient-centric organisation that prioritises patients across different disease areas. Equal access to innovation and medicine remains our key priority.

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