

Interview: Alya El Hedda – General Manager, Opalia-Recordati Tunisia



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Alya El Hedda, GM of Opalia-Recordati in Tunisia, describes the Opalia affiliate’s evolution since the Recordati takeover, her ambitions for the future, and how the company will leverage its production facilities – the largest in Tunisia – to become Recordati’s export hub for the rest of Africa and MENA.

Could you begin by introducing Opalia-Recordati Tunisian affiliate?

Opalia-Recordati is a Tunisian Laboratory founded at the end of the 1980s with the intention of bringing affordable quality healthcare to Tunisians and improving the quality of life in the country. It has grown to become the second largest pharmaceutical laboratory by volume in the country, and has 380 employees. Opalia-Recordati has been operating in West Africa for 20 years and has accumulated over 100 marketing authorisations in the region. Recordati acquired Opalia in 2013.

Opalia-Recordati is in charge of the research, development and commercialisation of products produced locally. In fact, since 2007, Opalia has had the largest production facility in the country. It is a three-story production site with a total surface area of 129,000sqft including 43,000 sqft of clean rooms that I intend to extend next year. Opalia-Recordati is also involved in clinical trial activities for the products it has developed under the Opalia brand.

What was the rationale behind this takeover and how will Opalia position itself within Recordati?

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I am very proud that Recordati took over Opalia because both companies base their growth strategy on innovation and personal development of their employees. Furthermore, the takeover will give way to a sustainable competitive advantage for the company. Recordati will leverage upon Opalia-Recordati's strong foothold in Tunisia and Western Africa to establish itself as a leading player on the continent. More specifically, because of Opalia's longstanding experience in West Africa and French-speaking countries in Africa, the Tunisian Affiliate of Recordati will be the base of the Italian company's future operations in Africa and MENA.

Also, I am looking forward to positioning Opalia-Recordati for future international operations. Opalia now boasts an international reputation and its employees will learn from Recordati's historic scientific knowledge and deeply-rooted humanist business ethics.

Recordati is committed to the improvement of the quality of life of people suffering from rare diseases and works together with patients and their families, with doctors and with the support of a highly specialized internal team.

What motivated you to found Opalia?

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I have a background as a pharmacist with a speciality in the pharmaceutical industry. After completing my studies at the University of Paris 11, I started working for the Tunisian Central Pharmacy (PCT). I always dreamed of curing people with the best quality care at the most affordable price possible. For the first five years following the creation of Opalia, our organisation conducted prevention campaigns in hospitals and sold sanitizers as well as disinfectants to limit the risk of nosocomial infections. Through regular training sessions across the country we made nurses increasingly aware of good practices to limit the risks of infection.

What role has Opalia played in Tunisia's social landscape?

Highly trained specialists and a scientific support team collaborate constantly with doctors and healthcare professionals, with patient groups and families to treat and improve the quality of life of suffering people.

Thanks to our specialists dedicated to the promotion of our products, Opalia-Recordati is able to reach patients in their homes.

How important are export activities for the affiliate?

We used to run the export activities of the Tunisian affiliate's products in Middle East and West Africa. Therefore, we ensured our products and manufacturing facilities are certified by the Gulf Countries Council (GCC). Opalia-Recordati should soon receive Medical device CE mark approved in Europe. However, since 2016, our export activities have been completely transformed as a result of Recordati's decision to restructure the organisation. To address the export markets in a more efficient manner, a strong and experimented team for the international development of exports has been created.

Having said this, Tunisia's production nowadays is mainly targeted at Libya, Iraq and West African countries and will soon be used as the main export platform to address all African markets. Indeed, Tunisia's strategic location, trained human resources and market knowledge will maximise Opalia-Recordati's chances of success in Africa.

Which therapeutic areas are driving Opalia-Recordati's growth?

Thanks to its flexibility and the established capability of its management, the Recordati is able to operate successfully in a market in continuous evolution and to identify fitting business opportunities as they arise.

The company is currently present in 20 different therapeutic areas and has accumulated around 200 marketing authorisations. Opalia-Recordati has a wealth of experience in OTC products and this segment still accounts for a large share of the Tunisian affiliate's revenue streams.

In addition to its consolidated presence in the cardio-metabolic, urology and gastrointestinal system areas, Opalia-Recordati is currently in the process of launching an anti-schizophrenic corporate product.

Looking into the future, I would like to develop Opalia-Recordati's presence in the asthmatic and diabetic therapeutic fields because these areas will offer the best growth prospects for a company like ours. Therefore, I will be concentrating the company's resources on these types of products and start offering continuous training to our laboratory workers. By 2020, I wish Opalia-Recordati to be leading the market and have 35 percent of its turnover coming from export activities

What is the revenue split between generic and licenced production?

Unlike many laboratories which started building capabilities with licensed product manufacturing before entering the generic market themselves, Opalia-Recordati did quite the opposite. We have been producing our own generic drugs for the past 30 years and started with licensing activities only five years ago. So far, Opalia produces four products under a licensing agreement and will continue developing these types of activities.

What makes Opalia Recordati different from its competitors?

Opalia-Recordati is a transparent company, fully committed to the development of its employees. Our employees learn a lot from each other because I have successfully implemented a corporate culture based on trust and cooperation and as a result, our employees are serious, efficient and rigorous.

In addition, Opalia-Recordati has continuously reinvested most of its earnings in the company's development, research and innovation. This management practice has allowed the company to remain at the forefront of technological progress.

How does Opalia-Recordati's slogan "Build tomorrow's health" translate into your daily activities?

After 30 years in the business, my passion for sharing is unchanged. I love to make people around me happy and foster hopes and dreams for patients. Most of what I do now is sharing the knowledge and experience in the industry with my colleagues so they can perpetuate the company's tradition for innovation and creativity. It is important our teams and citizens remain cohesive in Tunisia's hard times.

Looking back, I realise that knowledge, selflessness, and work are much more powerful than anything else. These are the pillars of passion, and passionate people have a competitive edge over those who don't have a passion for what they do.

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