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Biopharmaceutical companies have a big role to play in advancing innovation for health and driving collaborations to deliver better healthcare outcomes.

13.01.2022

Tags:

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Jamie Phares, Managing Director, Janssen, the Pharmaceutical Companies of Johnson & Johnson in the GCC, comments on the evolving approach to healthcare provision in the region, the role of Saudi Arabia in the regional healthcare market, and what the country needs to further develop its biopharma sector. In addition, she explains why new types of reimbursement models, such as value-based initiatives, should be tailored to the current capabilities of the region's healthcare systems, and why compassionate leadership is crucial to success as a life sciences executive.

Jamie, having worked with Johnson & Johnson in the EMEA region for over 16 years, can you share your career trajectory up to this point and define the scope of your current role as managing director for Janssen in the GCC?

I moved to Dubai from my homeland of America in 2005 after graduating from business school at Wharton. I was hired by Johnson & Johnson (J&J) in the Medical Devices sector, where I began in marketing for their Ethicon Endo-Surgery business, handling over 15 countries in the Middle East.

Over time, I had several leadership roles spanning across different geographies including in the Emerging Markets and in EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa). My last role before moving over to pharmaceuticals was Vice President of Ethicon Wound Closure for EMEA.

In May 2021, I joined Janssen as Managing Director for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In my current role, I have welcomed the challenge of learning and adapting to a new industry, and my mandate involves evolving the organization in order to meet the new demands of healthcare transformation and ensuring patient access to our innovative medicines. This is all part of the company's ultimate mission to create a future where disease is a thing of the past.

Having held many different roles with J&J over the last 16 years, I have been fortunate enough to see how the company operates at multiple levels and across different sectors. Thanks to this wide-ranging experience, I have been exposed to a real diversity of perspectives and schools of thought across the company. And this diverse, inclusive and equitable ethos, driven by Our Credo, is something I aim to embed in my current role and beyond.

For example, from my experience in the Medical Devices Sector, given the rapidly evolving field of surgery over the last twenty years, we've worked hard to bring novel devices and approaches from various markets around the world. This type of work must continue, in line with our region's ambition to become a global healthcare powerhouse.

In Janssen, we have made a conscious shift away from incremental innovation towards big therapeutical developments in our focus areas of Immunology, Neurosciences, Oncology, Pulmonary Hypertension and Infectious Diseases & Vaccines. And in the years ahead, we will continue to discover, develop and deliver transformational products that offer life-changing benefits for patients.

Being able to bring these life-changing therapeutical developments to the people of the GCC is a real privilege, and a constant motivator to make the most possible impact.

And at the same time, I want to make Janssen the best place to work in the region by creating a growth-mindset culture: A caring, positive, and inclusive space where we nurture our talent, build local capabilities and advance careers through a healthy meritocratic environment to allow people to be the best version of themselves. At the end of the day, the better we do our job, the more our team will grow and carve out new growth opportunities within the organization. My personal approach is to do all of this in a fun and caring atmosphere, by providing a model of compassionate and empathetic leadership.

The GCC region is a distinguished group of countries that have similarities in terms of purchasing power and culture but are not structured equally. How would you categorize the differences between their healthcare systems and approaches?

There are many commonalities that unite the GCC states, and the region's rapidly evolving socio-economic landscape. The healthcare systems across the GCC are all staffed with hardworking, dedicated, and competent professionals doing their best every day to make a difference for patients.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, countries are placing healthcare at the centre of their policymaking. We are seeing progressive regulatory frameworks, which are enabling us to make our products available across the GCC in record time.

It goes without saying that we are witnessing a transformation in the way governments are formulating their agendas. And it's exciting to see that public-private partnerships are at the heart of their approach to further advancements in the healthcare sector.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had an impact on the allocation of healthcare budgets in a similar manner. Whilst countries are addressing a possible stretch in budgets, the GCC states are fully

cognizant of the economic importance of investing in healthcare and they realize that every dollar spent on health unlocks a significant return, both socially and economically, and extends and enriches the lives of our citizens and residents.

Public-private partnerships continue to enable us to work together to find the most efficient and effective healthcare solutions, which means looking to value-based systems and initiatives.

In this direction, I think biopharmaceutical companies have a big role to play in advancing innovation for health and driving collaborations to deliver better healthcare outcomes. At Janssen, we are committed to facilitating this ongoing evolution, alongside industry associations and our partner countries.

An example is the work we are doing with the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers Association Gulf (PHRMAG) to identify new solutions for reimbursement that are tailored to the region. This includes different types of patient pooling, insurance mechanisms and working together on mutual industry objectives, with the goal in mind to broaden our reach in providing affordable access to patients with our innovative treatments.

Do you believe that the GCC countries have the right digital infrastructure and patient data to go into value-based medicine or risk-sharing agreements?

Data is the new universal currency. It is our tool to make better-informed decisions about healthcare and treatment, and a vital tool to unlock value-based healthcare which in turn requires an investment in technology.

Value-based healthcare is comprised of several components, but at the core, is knowledge sharing which can enable the building blocks of transformational change of healthcare systems across the GCC.

How receptive are Saudi authorities to the industry's input regarding changes to the healthcare system?

I am constantly impressed by the rapid advancements and openness of the regulators across the GCC, especially Saudi Arabia. The leadership has opened the door for collaboration towards its ambitious Vision 2030, and we are grateful for this open and collaborative environment. On a personal level, I feel deep gratitude to be part of this transformation.

A few months ago, in Saudi Arabia, we have signed an MoU with the Ministry of Investment of Saudi Arabia (MISA) that follows several others signed in 2020, and are intended to reinforce our commitment to being a part of the transformation of the Kingdom's healthcare and life sciences ecosystem.

The established framework under the MISA MoU spans four workstreams intended to deliver on several government initiatives including enhancing the business environment and funding, supporting the data and clinical trials ecosystem, enabling human capital development and boosting innovation in the private sector.

With these types of collaborations, we believe we are well-placed to continue to support the government's efforts to meet patient needs across all disease areas, fostering safer and healthier

populations.

Can you elaborate on Janssen's approach to partnerships in Saudi Arabia and the footprint that the organization is looking to develop in the country?

At Janssen, we are constantly striving to enhance our presence and impact in the countries which we serve. Janssen products have been in Saudi Arabia for more than 40 years and we continuously aim to revamp our footprint in order to ensure we can support the rapid market growth.

Recently, Janssen's partnership with the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) has kicked off in the collaborative efforts towards research on neglected tropical diseases. This is another area where we see tremendous opportunities as we seek to accelerate and advance our collaborative impact for the benefit of the Saudi population.

You spoke about fostering a caring, positive, and inclusive culture. What do you mean by it and what message are you sending internally to the organization as managing director?

One of the first things that I aim to convey to the team is the importance of compassionate leadership, something I learned earlier in my career. As each of us looks around our company, we must respect and love all of those around us. Every person has their own story, cultural context, talent, education, and background. And it's so important to harness all of those perspectives and life experiences and channel them into a diverse and inclusive team mix, and to trust that every employee is doing his best to deliver. Doing so will allow us to be better equipped – emotionally and mentally – to meet our patients' diverse needs.

I am very conscious of creating a supportive environment that empowers the team to do what is best for patients because innovations are a result of our organization's efforts and reflective of the full diversity of individuals, unique opinions and approaches.

Many of your colleagues working for multinational pharmaceutical innovators have described Saudi Arabia as a trailblazer for global product launches. Is that the case for Janssen and how does the clinical trials component fit into the equation?

Saudi Arabia has indeed become the trailblazer for novel product launches, and the Saudi Food and Drug Authority (SFDA) are clear about their requirements, timelines and processes, and they are very keen to ensure the best products are readily available for their patients.

With regards to clinical trials, we are doing more and more in the region. As an example, we are working with King Faisal Specialist Hospital & Research Center (KFSH & RC) on the first CAR-T clinical trial in multiple myeloma.

Johnson & Johnson has its own global network of open innovation hubs, JLABS, which help startup companies create and accelerate innovative health solutions. How can Saudi Arabia attract that sort of investment from J&J?

The Johnson & Johnson Innovation Labs (JLABS) is a wonderful initiative including biotech incubators established in very innovative-rich biopharma nuclei around the world – whether that is California, Boston, Belgium, London, or Shanghai.

Saudi Arabia is well-positioned for biotech innovation and investment, given its transformational mindset in advancing healthcare systems. We believe that partnering on the right initiatives and driven by Vision 2030, Saudi is well-placed for growth and advancement in the biopharmaceutical industry.

I believe that by leveraging our respective expertise and encouraging the open exchange of ideas, we can stay ahead of the curve to enable the best possible solutions for our patients and the overall healthcare system in Saudi. In this respect, we are very proud of collaborating with the Saudi Chapter of the Professional Society for Health Economics and Outcomes Research (ISPOR) last month to bring together multiple stakeholders to discuss the value of tech transfer in healthcare.

In a region where international talent comes to spend years but often leaves to continue developing their careers elsewhere, what organization are you looking to create with the long-term in mind?

I have been living in Dubai working for J&J for over 16 years, and I've had several opportunities to make our GCC organization stronger and stronger, and this time is no exception. Every day we have the privilege of helping patients, and this is only made possible through the passion and commitment of our thriving talents. We must create a place where people feel they belong and know that they are part of a unique culture that allows everybody to be their best self. As one team, we have to work together to elicit the best out of each other in a positive environment, and if we do that we will be better positioned to help patients, families, and communities as embodied in the J&J Credo.

I believe that creating and fostering a healthier world, starts with the workplace. Since arriving in the region, I have been inspired by the vast talent pool in the market. To deliver on business strategy on the short and the long term, we must have strategies to hire, develop and accelerate talents, most recently, J&J Saudi Arabia was awarded "The Best Places to Work" in 2020, and this is a testimony to our continued efforts.

We are looking to build an organization where motivated people come to learn and make a difference, pursuing a fulfilling career while being exposed to the best international practices and then innovating locally. We recently held an internal investment accelerator competition in which we invited all employees to propose new ideas to find and reach and better serve patients in the region and we received over 50 brilliant new ideas and we are excited about the execution plans to bring them to life.

We are on a journey at Janssen GCC to create the best company that's having the biggest impact on patients, and it's such a privilege to be leading it.

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