

Maher Elhassan VP & General Manager MENAT, Becton Dickinson



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Maher Elhassan, Becton Dickinson's VP and general manager for the Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey (MENAT), comments on the company's important role during the COVID-19 pandemic including the provision of diagnostic tools and syringes for vaccination and reveals why BD was the first medical technology company to be granted a 100 percent foreign-owned trading license in Saudi Arabia.

Can you start by briefly introducing your current role for Becton Dickinson and professional background?

I have been leading the Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey (MENAT) region for Becton Dickinson (BD) for almost seven years. Having studied computer science at the University of Montpellier, I started my professional career working in IT with IBM in Saudi Arabia.

My involvement with BD began in 2015 after its acquisition of CareFusion, where I was managing the MEA region. Prior to that experience, I was leading sales and marketing for Karl Storz, the leading endoscopic instruments manufacturer, and worked for Medtronic for a decade. I would describe my current goal with BD as advancing the world of health, working closely with customers to find solutions that benefit patients across this vast region.

How would you describe the importance of the MENAT region for the global organization, considering it is part of emerging markets?

The region is quite relevant due to the ongoing transformation of its healthcare industry, where medical technology is playing a vital role. We see providers dealing with an array of challenges ranging from preserving worker safety to controlling infections with effective medication management.

BD's portfolio and solutions in the region are aligned with its mission of "Advancing the World of Health" by improving medical discovery, diagnostics, and delivery of care. Our solutions speak directly to the challenges faced by healthcare providers, empowering them to deliver safe patient care while optimizing their operations.

The company has an important role to play in this region, and a big opportunity ahead, since the medical technology market in MENA was valued at USD 62 billion in 2020 and is projected to grow to USD 72 billion by 2025. There is unprecedented demand for our innovation here, which is why we look forward to continuing to offer our solutions and expertise to all relevant stakeholders; we understand that we can shape the future of healthcare for these communities.

With demand for its solutions on the rise, how is Becton Dickinson operating in the region and, in your view, what makes that the best approach to seize the opportunities you have described?

To appreciate our approach, we must understand the company's history in this part of the world. BD has been present in MENA for over 30 years after the establishment of an office in Dubai in the 1990s. The company has acquired a deep understanding of the socio-economic and cultural conditions along the way; we value the region's variety of economies, systems, challenges, and capabilities.

Our role within the ecosystem has taken on a new dimension after the COVID-19 pandemic. Today, there is a need to be closer to healthcare providers, patients, and policymakers to introduce their input into our technology and solutions.

Becton Dickinson is currently operating out of four offices in the region—in Dubai (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Turkey and an upcoming one in Egypt that will oversee North Africa, to name a few—where more than 300 associates work together to ensure patient safety, driving excellence for the future.

In Saudi Arabia, for example, we have a hybrid operation where we work together with about eight partners that support us in logistics and customer operations and have our own salesforce and marketing teams.

Becton Dickinson's CEO, Tom Polen, recently said that while COVID-19 was an existential threat for some, it was a call to action for your company. With high demand for much of BD's portfolio during the pandemic across diagnostic tests, medication delivery systems, vascular access devices and other critical care supplies, what role did BD play in your region?

The COVID-19 pandemic brought an unprecedented crisis; governments and communities faced significant challenges when looking for ways to accelerate testing and diagnosis to prevent the spread of the virus. With its purpose of advancing the world of health, BD doubled down on what it does best, tapping into available resources to help solve healthcare's biggest problems.

As one of the largest global medical technology companies in the world, we have been deploying our capabilities and expertise in the region, from diagnostic tools to identify the virus to real-time informatics, electronic surveillance technology, and essential medical devices to treat patients.

How would you characterize BD's role in Saudi Arabia, the region's largest market?

Saudi Arabia is a country close to my heart and I personally believe that the response from the authorities was exemplary. BD's role in the country included the provision of diagnostic solutions and around 35 million syringes for their vaccination campaign so far. Our efforts will continue as we keep partnering with the MoH and pharma companies to support booster doses and the inoculation of new age groups.

Throughout the crisis, the company has worked closely with the Saudi CDC and other key stakeholders, training healthcare practitioners on bacteria associated infections and safe vaccination procedures; our team is leaving no stone unturned in terms of safety measures for healthcare workers.

On that front, we are also prioritizing antimicrobial resistance (AMR), which occurs when bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites change over time and no longer respond to medicines, making infections harder to treat and increasing the risk of disease spread, severe illness and death. We have a broad portfolio of AMR solutions, including products that allow clinicians to properly identify infections and tailor treatments.

Beyond COVID-19, how important is Saudi Arabia for Beckton Dickinson's regional strategy?

Becton Dickinson's direct presence in Saudi Arabia was established in 1997 with the creation of a technical-scientific office in Riyadh. In 2018, with the support of the CEO and EMEA president, the company decided that it would better serve customers through a fully-fledged affiliate, becoming the first medical technology company to be granted a 100 percent foreign-owned trading license.

The investment has enhanced BD's commercial capabilities and expanded the scope of the mission of advancing health in Saudi Arabia. The relevance of this market for the regional strategy is reflected by the fact that our workforce in the country has quadrupled over the past four years

Many of your peers from multinational healthcare companies managing Saudi Arabia have spoken about the country as a priority market when it comes to product launches. Is that the same case for BD?

Yes, we are in a similar position because of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the sizeable transformation it is bringing. Since healthcare is a key pillar of the Kingdom's strategy, which calls for an integrated system that delivers value-based care, it has prioritized the introduction of the best

technology, something that BD is uniquely positioned to provide.

At the same time, new technology demands a big effort from companies to train healthcare practitioners, and BD is establishing a regional training centre. This project was delayed by the pandemic but is now back on track.

As a company, we strongly support Vision 2030, looking to add value in many places, from biosciences to lab automation and infection prevention. Finally, there is a deep sense of commitment within our organization to support local talent because they, not anyone else, will bring about the ambitious transformation of the country's healthcare system.

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