

Mohamed Swilam – Country Manager, Roche Egypt



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21.03.2019

Tags:

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Mohamed Swilam, country manager of Roche Egypt, explains how ensuring access to medicine in Egypt is not only related to pricing challenges, but also to support healthcare systems, improve diagnosis, educate and build local skills. He also gives insights into the company's plans on how to partner with stakeholders across the healthcare spectrum in order to be part of the solution and help more patients faster.

Can you give us an overview of Roche's scope of operations in Egypt?

Roche is a proactive and innovative partner in improving healthcare with a track record of success in developing and implementing patient-focused solutions. We partner with stakeholders across the healthcare spectrum in order to be part of the solution and reach more patients. Our vision is to bring better outcomes for more patients faster. To implement this, we need to understand very well our own assets as well as the unmet need in the market. Our purpose is to challenge the existing standards, by doing now what patients need next. This, of course, takes innovation. Roche currently has one of the strongest innovative pipelines, with 18 molecules in the late stage – all of them being designed to become breakthrough medication. They will transform the patient experiences and lives, just like our recent Multiple Sclerosis drug Ocrevus®[®], which reached blockbuster status one year after launching. The drug was approved in Egypt two month ago.

Roche is also looking into treating rare diseases such as Hemophilia and Huntington's diseases. It is important to translate the advancements of Roche globally to the local level here in Egypt. The market is not the biggest in terms of value, however, Roche cares deeply about helping patients all over the world to benefit from our innovation and believes in their right to access it. We have seen a significant improvement in terms of access here in Egypt, so we are bringing more innovative products to the country.

How easy is it bring products to the Egyptian market?

Using Ocrevus® as an example, we have witnessed our country's willingness to accelerate the registration process for this innovative treatment that can change MS patients' lives. Nevertheless, it took more than a year after its US launch to have it available here in Egypt. The challenge was to get the drug reimbursed by the public health insurance and by state funds. If you compare this example to the process five years ago, the situation has improved radically, as back then nobody would have even thought about asking for the reimbursement of an MS drug in Egypt. We are very fortunate now that the government has prioritized healthcare and encourages innovation. Even for them, it is not only about the price but also about the long-term outcome and Egyptians' quality of life, something we have not been used to before.

Given the pricing pressures we have seen in the last three years, how do you ensure your commitment to Egyptian patients by avoiding drug shortage, while also keeping up with the growth targets set by the HQ?

Our ultimate objective at Roche is to make sure that all patients have the right to access our treatments, regardless of any challenges we face. The healthcare industry has a noble cause, which is the health of human beings. I personally spend most of my time in transforming our business and make our employees here live Roche's vision. Delivering our vision and message continuously to the stakeholders will make them understand that we are serious about it. Obviously, we have to do our part by offering access solutions and strategic partnerships. We care for this generation and the future ones, we are committed to sustainable value creation. We deliver value through innovations that improve lives. We firmly believe "as our company's founder did" that a partnership between business and science can improve peoples' lives, and sometimes, even save lives. This is what has driven us for over 120 years.

Roche is very unique in this regard, as we do not have our targets set by HQ. The affiliates are trusted and empowered to do whatever it takes to implement Roche's vision and give access to our medications to as many patients as we can. There is no anxiety about fulfilling our targets from our side, but it shows again how real our vision is. The goal is to help patients and not only about reaching sales numbers. However, this puts a lot of pressure on the 120 employees that are working at Roche Egypt, on how to bring this innovation to be accessible to our Egyptian patients, and I am really proud to say that the Egyptian team have not witnessed any drug shortage in the last couple of years in spite of all the challenges that we went through.

Both public and private stakeholders have highlighted the responsibility of international companies in supporting the government, while Egypt slowly moves towards universal

healthcare. How is Roche taking part in the government's various campaigns?

By partnering with the right stakeholders, we can develop and implement tailored solutions that really make a difference on the ground. And we have to acknowledge that ensuring access to healthcare is a multidimensional challenge and there is no "one size fits all" solution. In Roche Egypt we are always supportive of collaborating on strategic partnerships with all key stakeholders from the government, NGOs, patient groups, the private health insurance industry, and the private sector to improve healthcare outcome and facilitate a unique experience for all our patients in their access to treatment.

We had recently signed MOU agreements with the National Health Insurance organization focusing on cancer, MS, and haemophilia. In line with the country's move towards universal healthcare coverage, one of these key partnership projects is related to improving the infrastructure by developing centres of excellence in governorates all over Egypt, and we are really proud to witness that the government had already launched three of them; one for MS in upper Egypt and two for cancer in Cairo and Port Said. These centres have been developed according to the international standard in order to offer HCPs & patients the qualified centres with the needed resources and facilities to access the innovative solutions effectively through the right diagnosis and disease management as well as offering continuous medical education programs for physicians, pharmacists and nurses to upscale their knowledge and capabilities.

We are also living in a time of hope, with new treatment & diagnostic approaches that can improve patient care. Quality and sustainable access needs to be the cornerstone of access solutions, dialogue and partnerships are critical to advancing patient access to improved standards of care. In the current times, it is not about fierce competition anymore. We need to collaborate with our competitors, as it creates a win-win-win situation for the patients, industry, and government.

Roche has been amongst the leading MNCs conducting clinical trials in the country. With the new law on clinical trials currently being discussed in parliament, how do you see the Egyptian clinical trials landscape changing in the next few years?

The law is still under discussion in the parliament, but we saw the comments made by the president on it, which are spot on. Currently, the main pitfalls are still the exportation of samples and the times of approval, which have been a great barrier in the past, in ensuring access to patients at a very early stage. We hope that these adaptations will be made, as it is crucial to have clinical trials in the country for creating new innovative products. As we are the company with the highest number of clinical trials and patients in clinical trials, we are very optimistic that the new law will improve the conditions in Egypt. Currently, Roche is conducting around 15 to 20 clinical trials in the country. Egypt has the potential to be a hub for clinical trials in the region, due to its population, the prevalence of diseases and the qualified staff in the validated centres. Roche, for instance, has an internal hub for trials, led by an Egyptian team.

Where would you like to see Roche Egypt in five years?

We want to be perceived as the most respected healthcare partner improving patients' lives. We are currently transforming internally as we want to challenge ourselves, be more innovative and open, and maintain our leadership position. Roche Egypt will be more agile in the next few years, which will lead to a completely new customer experience of bringing innovation to patients quicker and eventually fulfil our vision.

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