

Myriam Hakim – General Manager GCC, Kyowa Kirin (January 2020)



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Myriam Hakim, the recently appointed GM for Japanese specialty pharma firm Kyowa Kirin's UAE affiliate, discusses the strategic significance of the UAE and the Gulf region as a whole to the global group.

Having worked in the pharmaceutical industry for more than 20 years, you recently joined Kyowa Kirin. What motivated you to make this change?

Initially, it was Kyowa Kirin's portfolio focus on rare diseases that attracted me to the position. Starting a new business that covers rare diseases is also very exciting. Moreover, the different therapeutic areas, the pipelines and the innovation with antibody technology is what I found to be the most interesting. Previously I was focused on a much broader portfolio of treatments, whereas Kyowa Kirin in the GCC countries is far more specialized. Focusing on the specialty portfolio is a brand new area for me and it has been a great journey since I started.

What strategic significance do the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries hold for Kyowa Kirin?

Although there is little scientific data on the prevalence of rare diseases in the region, we believe that the GCC market has the required structure and stability and they are the biggest in terms of population and number of patients. Furthermore, compared to other emerging markets, the healthcare sector is far more structured and better defined. This makes the GCC market highly significant for the entire Middle East region.

The GCC is a collection of various markets, which countries are you prioritizing within this?

We are not prioritizing any specific market within the region, but rather we are prioritizing patients. The more patients we have in a market, the more urgent it is for us to provide them with the appropriate treatment. We are adapting our strategy to the market need. For instance, in the UAE, more than 80 percent of patients are expatriates. Therefore, our strategy is adapted to fit both local and non-local populations. We believe that each and every patient should have access to treatment when needed. We remain steadfast in our commitment to working with healthcare professionals, government agencies and policymakers to ensure, where possible, people who could benefit from Crysvita receive access to this new treatment option as quickly as possible.

In the coming years, where do you see Kyowa Kirin aligning itself strategically?

I see Kyowa Kirin as an established Japan-based specialty pharmaceutical company well recognised in GCC for its special strengths in biotechnology, striving to contribute to the wellbeing of the patients through its innovative drugs, mainly in core therapeutic areas such rare disease and oncology.

2018 has been a good year for the company with the approval of Crysvita in the EU and the US. What is the scope for launches such as this in the GCC and will you be bringing Crysvita to the region?

Indeed in 2018, EMA granted conditional marketing authorization for Crysvita for the treatment of XLH. Furthermore, in April 2018, the US FDA and in Dec 2018 Health Canada recognized the benefits for Crysvita and approved it for both adults and children more than a year old who are living with XLH. Crysvita has already been approved in the UAE for paediatrics and adults's indications and it was the first country in EMEA region to get the approval for both indications soon after it was approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and EMA. The UAE ministry of health is keen to fast track innovative drugs to make these available for the patients in need.

XLH is a rare genetic disease that causes abnormalities in the bones muscles and joints and it has a lifelong burden. While symptoms of XLH can vary from one person to another, children with XLH typically experience progressive bowing of the legs, delayed growth and short stature, difficulty walking and mobility issues, bone and joint pain due to rickets, irregularity in the shape of the head and dental problems such as abscesses and cavities.

Crysvita has demonstrated clinical value through a robust body of clinical evidence, making a difference in the lives of patients with X-linked hypophosphatemia (XLH).

We already have a few patients under treatment in this country and we are currently securing early access programs to make the treatment accessible in the rest of GCC.

The feedback we have from healthcare practitioners is positive and it makes me feel proud to work for Kyowa Kirin, especially the way that access to our innovative treatments is putting a smile on patients's faces.

Some of the companies we have spoken to are using the UAE and GCC region as a testbed for some of their products, and in few cases are first to market here as well. Is this true for Kyowa Kirin?

I appreciate all the efforts the authorities have been putting into fast-tracking registration for innovative products immediately post FDA or EMA approval. This is for the good of the country, it is how we make sure that innovative drugs will be available for patients to benefit from this therapeutic option. UAE is a hub for GCC and the MENA region for accessing innovative and new therapeutic options

I believe that the dialogue between the national authorities and the multinational companies is more fluid than it is in other regions, such as Europe. Both entities are listening to each other to drive healthcare forward. I believe keeping in contact and working together with the local and national authorities is key in raising awareness and becoming more impactful.

We remain committed to working hand in hand with all the important stakeholders to ensure access to treatment wherever possible and needed.

In my opinion, the UAE is one of the rare places in the Middle East from where we will be able to procure data, at least in the near future, due to being so far advanced compared to any other country in the region. It has a strong and constantly evolving structure and is incredibly welcoming of innovation. Furthermore, everyone is becoming increasingly aware of the need to source local data and statistics within the region.

Kyowa Kirin is still very much a Japanese company with only 35 percent of its revenues coming from overseas. What differentiates your strategy for the GCC region?

Our goal is to develop our GCC business to align ourselves with the global vision of Kyowa Kirin to become a Japan-based global specialty pharmaceutical company. In essence, GCC is part of the EMEA region which is part of the global structure that is organized under four regions: Japan, EMEA, North America (US/Canada) and Asia Pacific.

How easy is it to source talent in the UAE?

We have more than 15 nationalities represented in this office and I am proud to say that 45 percent of our workforce are women. Furthermore, the UAE is an extremely attractive destination for young talent which is incredibly valuable for a highly demanding company like Kyowa Kirin, as it makes it less complicated to find the talent with the background we are looking for.

What is your vision?

We are committed to working for the most precious presence on this planet, the life of our patients. We strive to contribute to the health and wellbeing of patients worldwide by discovering and commercialising highly innovative drugs, driven by state of art antibodies technology.

Are there any corporate social responsibility programs you are looking to implement in the near future?

Our values are very important to us internally and externally. Our core values are commitment to life, innovation, integrity and teamwork. Having said this, we would like to put in place and support focused educational programs to raise awareness of rare diseases in general and XLH in particular. Moreover, we want to work closely with rare disease organizations to put in place support programs, to help patients and their families through their journey. It is very important to give a voice to patients and support them to share their experience with other patients

What would you say to executives who may not be aware of the incredible opportunities the UAE has to offer?

UAE offers a great platform to establish a business in the Middle East, it is a diverse and rich environment, it is evolving and growing rapidly. The region is highly receptive to innovation, however, the market is becoming more demanding at many levels.

Where will we see Kyowa Kirin in five yearsâ?? time?

Kyowa Kirin may be new to the GCC, however, Kyowa Kirin has more than a century of heritage and presence in Japan. I would like to see Kyowa Kirin in the GCC established as a reference company in the core therapeutic areas of rare disease and oncology for all involved stakeholders including patients, healthcare practitioners, hospitals, policymakers, patientsâ?? organizations and health authorities.

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