

Driving Pharma innovation in the UAE and wider region

Cara Turner, Brand Director for CPhI Middle East & Africa speaks to Marwan Abdulaziz Janahi, Executive Director of Dubai Science Park to discuss approaches to stimulating innovation and creating a sustainable pharmaceutical industry across the Middle East and Africa.



Marwan Abdulaziz Janahi, Executive Director, Dubai Science Park

Marwan Abdulaziz Janahi is Executive Director of Dubai Science Park, a vibrant and holistic science-focused community dedicated to serving entrepreneurs, SMEs and multinational enterprises operating in the life sciences, energy and environment sectors. Dubai Science Park is a member of the TECOM Group.

Janahi has played an instrumental role in establishing Dubai Science Park as the region's leading community for scientific research and innovation, attracting more than 350 companies and strengthening partnerships among corporations, universities, and communities.

Janahi also serves as Chairing Member of the Pharmaceuticals and Medical Equipment Taskforce of the Dubai Industrial Strategy. In this capacity, he works with the Executive Council of Dubai to augment research and development investments, and enhance local pharmaceutical infrastructure and manufacturing capabilities.

Prior to his current position, Janahi held various roles from Sales Manager to Director at DuBiotech and EnPark, two free zones that have joined forces to now form Dubai Science Park. Early in his career, he worked as Commercial Manager for the UAE and Iran at Davidoff, the Swiss luxury goods brand, and as Business Analyst at DUBAL.

Marwan Abdulaziz Janahi holds a BBA in Marketing from the University of Texas at Arlington in the US. In addition, he has successfully completed the INSEAD-UAE Consortium for Executive Development programme, the Cranfield General Management Programme at Cranfield University in the UK, and the Future Leaders Programme for UAE nationals.

In 2017, you held several meetings in your capacity as Chairing Member of the Pharmaceuticals and Medical Equipment taskforce of the Dubai Industrial Strategy 2030, aimed at identifying opportunities to grow Dubai's position as a global platform for a sustainable pharmaceutical industry. Could you share insights into what these initiatives look like, and your efforts over the past year?

Marwan: Before going into more detail about the initiative, allow me to introduce Dubai Science Park (DSP) to the reader. Our vision at DSP is to create and nurture a community of companies with a vested interest in the life-sciences, energy and environment sectors. Today we offer a holistic ecosystem to companies of all sizes, including start-ups, SMEs and MNEs. More than 350 companies call DSP their home and use our offices, manufacturing and research facilities, researching and developing innovative products and services. Our unique approach of putting equal emphasis

on our business partners has helped them – whether an entrepreneur, a small business or the Pzifiers of this world – to succeed in a highly competitive environment.

And to help kick-start those vital partnerships...

Marwan: Yes, exactly. It was important for the Government of Dubai to shift from a service-based economy to a more sustainable industrial model. At the time, the government wanted to look into six strategically important sectors, one of which was the pharmaceuticals and medical equipment sector. It became apparent that DSP, through its proactive and collaborative approach, is in a unique position to bring stakeholders from government, academia and industry under one roof. In September 2016, I was selected to lead the taskforce.

Since 2017, we began collaborations with IMS Quintiles (now IQVIA), a medical research provider, to support us in developing a strategy and to determine the specifics of the

task at hand. We also examined what achieving those tasks would entail.

We wanted to highlight which opportunities we could capitalise on immediately, and which ones we could explore five to 10 years down the line - so it's essentially a 10-year plan. This exercise gave us direction on which companies to focus on.

Simultaneously, we looked at enablers that would make Dubai more attractive in terms of manufacturing or as a manufacturing platform - what is the IP protection environment? Do we have the right workforce in the market? Do we have trade relations between countries that enable exports?

So essentially, doing some housekeeping to start mapping out the landscape before you can take the vision further?

Marwan: Yes, and it has been an important part of the process, because when we go to decision-makers or if a policy change or amendment is required, we can enter a room and say with confidence: "We want to do this because it will make us more competitive. If we are more competitive, these are the companies that will want a presence here, this is how many jobs will be created and this is how much investment you need to make". It's a targeted approach and we have already identified companies that are the key players. The reason we know the CPhI event portfolio is because most of these target companies take part in CPhI at some level – so it is great to hear of the launch of CPhI MEA.

Given that you're working with R&D professionals, entrepreneurs, start-ups and SMEs, you must see a huge amount of innovation and development. What can you tell us about pharma innovation in Dubai and across the wider region?

Marwan: Innovation comes from two main sources and should always be driven this way. The first is academia and the other is industry. Academia-led innovation takes longer to bear fruit in contrast to industry-led innovation, but having that combination where the industry has visibility on what's happening in academia – creating a bridge between them – is very beneficial in the long-term. Industry is always very practical in its approach, and quicker in decision making. It can offer some guidance to academia in this respect. What could be said is: 'I like the idea you're working on but how can we make it happen? How can we commercialise it?'. Such a dialogue between industry and academia is crucial.

Apart from the UAE, we've been working with many universities

and have also reached out to others in the wider region. So far, it's been highly positive to see what's happening in Lebanon, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

It's equally great to see academia doing more and more research and development, and the industry presence growing. As mentioned earlier, an important part of our role at DSP is to bridge the two.

Staying on the subject of innovation, do you have a sense as to which therapeutic area we might see the most exciting developments in?

Marwan: There are two fields to mention here. It is a fact that 60% of diseases relate to lifestyle - particularly metabolic and cardiovascular illnesses. So, a lot of companies want to start using this stat as a starting point. Personally, I believe the future is also in oncology. We are beginning to engage with this field more, in terms of biosimilars and next generation sequencing for cancer. Of course, this is about thinking more long-term. To start with, it's important to create a strong base and then build on it with more complex, longer-term projects.

The MENA-region is the only region within the pharma sector that is forecasting double digit growth in the next 5 years, and we see the UAE becoming the hub of that region and an important base for import and re-export. Are there specific countries which you consider to be particularly progressive at this time?

Marwan: I definitely see pockets of good practice in different regions. Lebanon, for example, seems to be very strong in medical device development because it has a solid engineering base. Egypt is stronger on the pharma side as it has been active for a long time – the country's first factory opened some 100 years ago. The UAE has been the region's hub for a very long time and has always been a meeting point for traders from Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

Everything we do here is about facilitating the trading hub: Dubai has long been an important destination for trade - the airline connections, the size of the port, the hotels that we have, everything is geared towards facilitating trade and connections.

As such, it's very important to make pharma a part of this ecosystem. For example, Emirates Airlines has invested in a pharma cold chain company called Sky Pharma because it has global connections and most pharma exports are done by air. In that sense, investing in a pharma logistics company is a very strategic move.



So, the logistics are in place to facilitate trade in pharma, what about the policy?

Marwan: One reason for setting up the taskforce was to find answers to this exact question. We are mandated to study what policies are required to continue transforming Dubai into a healthcare hub, and how we can enable the opportunities we have identified.

We can say with certainty that we would like to capitalise on our identity as a hub for the region. But, we need to first examine how relevant our policies are to the region, and if we are looking at the UAE's policies alone. This is an important angle to consider, which is why I think CPhI can play a significant role. The event could help us learn from other regions, identify best practices from around the world, and decide what can we adapt and what can work for us.

There are many regions that are similar to ours in respect to size but enjoy access to a larger market. Singapore or Ireland are probably smaller than the UAE in terms of population, but have access to larger markets. For instance, Singapore has access to China, Ireland to Europe and Puerto Rico to the US. All of these countries are strong players when it comes to pharma exports, and I think we can learn a lot from their experience.

What are the main obstacles you anticipate in the coming year that the DSP is tasked with overcoming?

Marwan: Annually, we host a gala dinner to which we invite all our pharma partners. In 2017, we used this platform to launch the Dubai Industrial Strategy and outline our goals. This year, we highlighted the obstacles we are facing and the roadmap to resolving them. We hosted panel discussions, one on IP protection and the other on workforce development – two key challenges we are facing at the moment that are also strong enablers when attracting companies to the region.

In the IP discussion, a leading law firm, pharma association, manufacturer and I spoke about concerns that we have and potential resolutions. The conclusion was that local IP regulators do not have sound knowledge of pharma as they cover IP for all industries, and do not have pharma-specific expertise - this is something we plan to present to the government that has thus far been very open to such discussions.

In the second panel, we spoke about workforce availability and their skill-set, and it was agreed that some sort of vocational training is required for employees to enter the

manufacturing phase. Despite the fact that many processes are now being automated, you still need a skilled workforce on an operational level. So, there is this imperative to understand and develop the skills that we need and the level of knowledge required.

To conclude, what's your outlook for pharma in the UAE and across the wider region?

Marwan: There is growth in the region's pharmaceutical industry for one key reason: universal insurance has just been implemented, which in turn will create a great platform for generics, super generics and biosimilars, in particular. Once you have a larger patient population and an increased need, both pricing and quality become hugely important - something we haven't faced until now.

This increased demand is one of the main drivers of market growth across the region. And manufacturers must find a way to take advantage of this - how can they play a central role? Can they think outside the box and be innovative to solve regional problems?

With the Dubai Industrial Strategy 2030 and the increased focus on pharma, this is a very interesting time. We are working to make Dubai and the UAE more competitive by looking at different aspects of the industry, whilst simultaneously having the industry collaborate with us to realise its growth plans.



**With thanks to the
Dubai Science Park for their
insight and collaboration.**

