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## **A growing culture of clinical research**



Few clinical research organizations exist in the Middle East, although more pharmaceutical and biotech companies are outsourcing medical trials to these companies elsewhere in the world. Alaa Assem, the chief executive of Clinart MENA, based in the UAE, discusses his company's effort to grow in this sector.

### **What exactly does your business do?**

We are helping research institutes, and providing them training to meet international standards. We're also working to attract clinical trials in the region that would be part of a global network of researchers and working on new treatments. Patients would benefit from new treatments before they become available in the market. That's one of our major objectives - to attract global studies to the region.

### **What are the risks of clinical trials? There must be a long list of liability concerns.**

I think there is. This is defined by the regulatory bodies, and we have seen in the last few years all the countries in the region, including UAE, are working on patient rights. There are international standards on roles of [clinical research organizations] and approval processes to ensure you minimize the risk and protect the patient. That is already well defined. We actually have to seek approvals from a ministry of health to get protocol approved first, then monitor the safety of the study until its completion.

### **Why is this important sector for the region?**

If we talk about improvement in health care in general, it's not only about building the hospitals but the capabilities of the medical expertise - and improving the delivery of health care and patient outcomes. The important part of this is education and training, developing the research infrastructure in universities and hospitals.

**What is one of the major challenges to growing a clinical research hub here?**

Finding trained professionals. As a new industry, I'd say there isn't really that much professional training in the market, so we have to take young graduates and train them to become a professional clinical researcher.

**You were appointed CEO last year. Why was there was a management change?**

The change of management came with the new growth capital injected in the company. The original founder of the company came to a point where she realized she needed to move to a different place and attract some investments.

**How much of an investment did Clinart receive?**

\$6 million (Dh22m) [is approximately the] company valuation after the injection. The company valuation [before] was probably in the range of \$1m to \$1.5m ... Currently we're in Dubai Healthcare City and moving to a new [office] as part of our expansion plan. This is a very new field in the region. The [clinical research] business is relatively small, yet growing, within [the Middle East and North Africa]. Having investors come on board is something that's new, and should be a good sign to encourage others as well.