Episode 3

16 November 2023 – I am Nevien Attalla, and I serve as Operations Manager at the WHO logistics hub in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. My background in pharmacy has facilitated my career journey and contributed significantly to humanitarian efforts. I had been a microbiological instructor to the retail field before joining the United Nations Humanitarian Response Depot in 2012, where I found my true passion in humanitarian response. In 2015, the WHO logistics hub in Dubai was established, and it has since provided me with many valuable experiences in the

humanitarian sector.

Humanitarian work, by its nature, often involves working in a challenging and unpredictable environment, especially in a world fraught with natural disasters, conflicts and disease outbreaks. Managing the pharmaceutical supply in a humanitarian setting presents an immense number of unique challenges, starting from sourcing items from limited suppliers and maintaining the proper storage conditions and temperature control for every item. Then come the challenges of optimizing pre-positioned order quantities while ensuring a healthy shelf life, ensuring quality assurance measures, and navigating the complex logistics associated with varying regulations in different countries.

The WHO logistics hub in Dubai brings hope to millions of people in need of health aid across all 6 WHO regions. I have learned valuable life lessons from being part of these operations, the latest of which was the prompt delivery of life-saving medicines to Al-Arish for their eventual delivery to the Gaza Strip to support WHO, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and other humanitarian agencies.

I have learned to be resilient and adaptable, finding creative solutions to problems while remaining focused in difficult times. The humanitarian response requires collaboration with diverse groups of people, including those in local authorities, government agencies and humanitarian organizations within and outside the United Arab Emirates. This has taught me the importance of effective communication, cooperation and coordination to achieve our common goals in a culturally sensitive and respectful manner.

One of the toughest periods in my working life was during the COVID-19 emergency response. While many were able to work remotely and stay safe at home, our team had to maintain our physical presence, and for longer hours, to ensure the timely delivery of aid and personal protective equipment. The workload increased vastly and concerns about the health and safety of our team also increased. Being away from home for longer hours during this critical time, facing increased personal risks and exposing my family to the same risks added an extra layer of complexity and discomfort to our work environment.

Balancing humanitarian operations with my personal responsibilities – as a wife and mother, caring for my home and my 3 youth – makes it more challenging. But knowing how effective our humanitarian responses are significantly mitigates the challenges that I face.

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