The major challenges that will transform Korean hospitals over the ten coming years are predicted to be aging population, urban concentration, digital transformation and infectious diseases.

South Korea currently has a total fertility rate of 1.052, and is expected to enter a super-aged society in 2025. To prepare for the aging population, the government and hospitals are making efforts in geriatric medicine, rehabilitation medicine, hospice program, managing chronic diseases, and health promotion. At the same time, hospitals can’t overlook acute care and it is a double burden to many of the hospitals.

Infrastructure for workplaces, schools, businesses and leisure are limited in rural areas and therefore population is concentrated in large cities, which is causing difficulties in operating local medical institutions. Unlike the Seoul metropolitan area, private hospitals in small and medium-sized cities will lose their patients due to the decreasing population of provincial and small cities, which will pose a serious threat to local residents’ health rights. For local hospitals to survive, the healthcare delivery system should be reformed, and policies and incentives should favor the local hospitals. Though, the problem remains hiring doctors and nurses in local areas, as they want to work in large cities.

Industry 4.0 has brought a new wave in healthcare industry and a genetic scissor, 3D printing, telemedicine, non-invasive target therapy, brain science research and early health models are already being used in some leading hospitals. A digital transformation is taking its shape, but detailed policy and implementation is still at a starting point. It is necessary to identify what digital transformation will bring to healthcare through joint research with global IT and AI businesses.

Infectious diseases such as Influenza A and MERS are a common international issue. One infected patient can cause mass death on the other side of the globe. Cooperation between countries and individual countries should be enhanced together with their ability to respond to infectious diseases. Government finances should be injected into major medical institutions to maintain infection control facilities, and international cooperation for vaccine and therapeutic research and development. Korea also faced national difficulties by experiencing the new flu and MERS, but has overcome it through cooperation with WHO and concentration of internal capabilities.

About the Korean Hospital Association

Founded in 1959, the KHA has accompanied the nations’ adversities and glorious moments with its medical services, and it has advanced the development of the healthcare industry in the areas of medical research, education for healthcare leaders, and as a source of information on healthcare issues and trends.