Oman is a young nation which has taken monumental steps in social development. It witnessed a period of rapid population and infrastructure growth that saw remarkable improvement of the population’s health indicators. Rapid and astonishing change was brought about by a combination of increasing resources, determined leadership, stable policies and a responsive culture within the society. The health and hospital sector in Oman experienced a rapid expansion phase both quantity and quality-wise, resulting in the decline of communicable diseases and increase in life expectancies.

The main challenges facing the hospitals in Oman, which will result in their transformation, are related to the same factors that contributed to the boom described above: resource constraints, demographic changes and disease pattern changes.

Hospitals are costly institutions. They require high capital investment to construct them and similarly high operational costs to sustain them. In Oman, costing and hospital emphasis on efficiency and productivity of hospitals has not yet been adequately addressed and we find it difficult to accurately calculate fundamental things like unit costs and rate of returns. Introducing these concepts will be a challenge and hospital administrators will have to strive to sustain and improve their hospital’s operations using innovation and performance-improvement strategies.

The second most important challenge hospitals will face is related to the demographic shifts and changes within the population. What was once a typical young population’s age pyramid has transformed into a more mature population age pattern, resulting in less youngsters and more middle-aged population. The increase in life expectancy introduced a whole new set of challenges for hospitals and their role is no longer limited to the provision of health care to a young population, but to an aging population with geriatric health care needs.

The third important category of challenges is related to the changes in disease patterns of the population. Oman witnessed a significant change in lifestyle, from foods consumed to the jobs people do. The sedentary lifestyle and increased consumption of unhealthy foods paved the way to the current lifestyle and non-communicable diseases. These diseases are chronic and result in significant comorbidities that have to be addressed by the hospitals, resulting in greater costs.

Challenges are opportunities in disguise and there are multiple opportunities available to overcome the challenges faced by the hospitals in Oman. These can be short-term solutions and long-term solutions that fall within the categories of promotive, preventive and better curative health services.

The surge in obesity and non-communicable diseases like diabetes could be controlled by the control of access to fast foods to increasing the access to walkways and healthy neighborhoods. The health promotive services are important in ensuring healthy aging of the population and a reduction in the need for health care services provided by the hospitals.

Preventive health care programs like programs for quitting smoking, weight control programs, universal health screening programs have all been introduced in Oman and will be incorporated further into the social and health systems.

Oman has established a well-equipped and planned health care delivery system that is based on extensive and readily-accessible primary and secondary health services. These primary and secondary health care services are managed in a decentralized manner and all of them refer patients to the tertiary hospitals when needed and receive them back when done. The regional hospitals can refer the patients to the tertiary central hospitals for specialized care. From the smallest primary health care center to the tertiary specialized center, the institutions contained within the matrix of health care service providers operate as paperless and connected services allowing access to information from any point. Integration of the hospital’s role to go beyond its walls and into the community is a realistic and achievable target that can overcome the challenges described earlier and will result in a better health care system.

Oman relies heavily on a hydrocarbon economy (>80% of total revenues). Income from hydrocarbons is finite, fluctuates and is practically the main source of current wealth. It places the country’s economy in critical uncertainty of its financial public funding. Hospitals are known to have economic, political and social weight to drive change. Hence, to tackle the economic uncertainties, Omani hospitals will have to participate and influence economic diversification through branding and becoming hubs for medical tourism.

About the Ministry of Health, Sultanate of Oman

The Ministry of Health (MOH) is responsible for ensuring the availability of health care to the people of Oman. In the course of implementing its health development plans, the Ministry’s organization was adapted to synchronize with the strategies and objectives which were formed in 1990. These can be summarized broadly as:

1. Governing realization of health services and decentralization of decision making in specified technical, administrative and financial affairs
2. Emphasizing the role and importance of planning
3. Development of Education and Training in health
4. Emphasizing the importance of health systems research
5. Emphasizing the importance of governorate and international relations