How and why will hospitals have changed in the UAE by 2029?

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Dubai Health Authority (DHA) was created, in June 2007, by Law 13 issued by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE, Ruler of Dubai. The President of the DHA is His Highness Sheikh Hamdan Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Deputy Ruler of Dubai and His Excellency Humaid Mohammed Obaid Al Qutami is the Director General of DHA.

The DHA actively plans for the future of care delivery in the Emirate. We believe the three major challenges confronting DHA in the coming 10 years are 1) Work force recruitment and development, 2) Transformation of the care continuum to ensure high quality, efficient and innovative delivery of care, and 3) Rapid access to adoption of new technologies.

Healthcare delivery is a service industry and, as a result, 60-80% of the costs of care are labor. Identifying, orienting, and developing human talent is difficult locally especially in a highly competitive international market with an overall low unemployment rate for highly skilled workers. The UAE market is very complex with the multitude of languages and different home country training programs of professionals, making licensing and privileging very difficult. The DHA response to the continual and increasing need for highly skilled labor is the development of local professional schools for physicians, nurses and clinical support services (pharmacy, laboratory medicine, physical therapy etc.). Furthermore, we are developing tools to support our professionals to improve productivity through the implementation and optimization of the electronic medical records and creating automated tracking of labor productivity. We are also examining the use of trained professional support personnel like nurse practitioners, optometrists, and professional technicians like anesthesia technicians or for physical therapy to increase physician productivity. We believe the combination of local high-quality training programs and increased labor productivity will enable us to grow in the future. The major risk in achieving our goal is the speed of implementation of professional training programs and the ability to retain top talent once recruited in this highly competitive environment.

A second major challenge confronting DHA is the need to transform the care continuum to ensure high quality, efficient care that is adaptive to the changes in healthcare. Currently our primary care does not have patient continuity of care (a patient sees the doctor assigned that day and not a personal physician), our length of stay in the inpatient environment is longer than expected and our OP/ post-acute care options are limited. DHA is confronting these challenges by working on Patient Centered Medical Home in our primary care, enhancing outpatient options (day surgery) and enabling innovations like telemedicine. Further to reduce the cost of care, we are developing clinical care maps to prevent duplication and ensure volume-based competency. Our Regulation Sector is exploring “certificates of need” to improve the quality of care especially in our Centers of Excellence. The risk for this challenge is the speed of implementation and the impact of change on our labor force.

The third major challenge is rapid access and implementation of new technologies (pharmaceutical and device) to ensure DHA is delivering the most current therapies. Healthcare is rapidly changing especially in the field of personalized medicine and biological drug and stem cell therapies. Early access to these technologies is often dependent on access to basic research and clinical trials often through affiliation with major universities. As we develop improved educational systems, we plan to attract and partner with international universities, enabling new therapies for our patients. Our risk to enabling innovation may partially be cultural acceptance but is also heavily dependent on cost and budget.

All in all, DHA is very optimistic in our understanding of the healthcare challenges of the future and our willingness and ability to address these challenges to provide the highest quality of care comparable to our international colleagues.

About the Dubai Health Authority:

The Dubai Health Authority (DHA) was created in June 2007, by Law 13 issued by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE, Ruler of Dubai, with an expanded vision to include strategic oversight for the complete health sector in Dubai and enhance private sector engagement.

Prior to the establishment of the DHA, the Department of Health and Medical Services, which was established in 1973, was the functioning authority that almost exclusively focused on health service delivery.

In May 2018, H.H Sheikh Mohammed issued Law No. (6) of 2018 of the DHA. The new Law further enables the DHA to achieve its objectives including regulating medical services in Dubai, enhancing competitiveness and transparency, improving medical services and products based on international best practices and achieving the sector’s objectives according to approved strategic plans.

H.H Sheikh Mohammed also issued Decree No. 17 of 2018 establishing subsidiaries of the DHA, the Dubai Healthcare Corporation and Dubai Health Insurance Corporation, to further enhance healthcare services in Dubai and enable DHA to fulfill its responsibilities and obligations.

Three new strategic sectors were also added as part of the decrees; they include Strategy and Corporate Development, Health Regulation, and Shared Support Services.

In addition to overseeing the health sector for the Emirate of Dubai, the DHA also focuses on providing services through DHA healthcare facilities including Latifa, Dubai, Rashid and Hatta Hospitals, its 12 primary healthcare centers, 17 medical fitness centers and its 6 specialty centers.