



AN ANALYSIS OF THE OLD, CURRENT, AND FUTURE SYSTEMS OF THE HEALTHCARE SERVICES IN SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT:

This report offers a thorough summary of Saudi Arabia's healthcare services' past development as well as their possible future. Over time, Saudi Arabia's healthcare system has undergone a substantial transformation, moving from a decentralized and resource-constrained structure to one that is more organized and efficient. Early in the new millennium, the Health Transformation Program (HTP) was introduced, which was a game-changer that led to advancements in healthcare staff, modernization, and infrastructure. Future developments in Saudi Arabia's healthcare system are anticipated by Vision 2030, which calls for a greater dependence on technology, telemedicine, involvement from the private sector, and a primary focus on preventative and basic healthcare. There are still issues to be resolved, such as managing regional differences, adjusting to an aging and expanding population, and promoting public-private partnerships. It is anticipated that Saudi Arabia's healthcare system would continue to change, driven by the goal of offering its people high-quality, affordable, and accessible healthcare.

KEYWORDS: Healthcare services, Old, Current, Future systems, Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of Saudi Arabia's healthcare system from a disorganized, antiquated model to a modern, well-functioning one with bright future possibilities is indicative of the

country's dedication to improving the health of its people. A strong intention to promote positive transformation in the healthcare system is indicated by the formation of the Saudi Health Council, the HTP, and Vision 2030. By doing this, Saudi Arabia hopes to address the issues brought about by changing demographics and the demand for a more technologically sophisticated, varied, and egalitarian healthcare system¹.

The process of transforming the healthcare industry is complex and includes growing worker capacity, developing infrastructure, and integrating technology to improve the quality and accessibility of healthcare. It is anticipated that the country's strong dedication to healthcare innovation and research would further solidify its standing on the international healthcare scene as it advances.

On the other hand, it is imperative to continue being aware of potential hazards. Population growth, healthcare inequities, and making technologies accessible to all societal sectors are challenges that demand continuous attention. The accomplishment of these goals is crucial for the welfare of Saudi people as well as evidence of the country's capacity for adaptation and growth in a world that is changing rapidly².

Historical Overview Saudi Arabia's Healthcare System

Saudi civilization was traditional, remote, and impoverished prior to the discovery of oil, suggesting that the country's way of life was extremely archaic. There was no standardized healthcare system in place during this time, and the majority of medical treatments were based on conventional methods and medications. King Abdulaziz Al-Saud (1880–1953), the visionary head of Saudi Arabia, issued an executive decree in 1926 creating a “Health Department”³. Even though the Kingdom was still impoverished and underdeveloped, this one-of-a-kind event was a turning point in the modernization of the healthcare system and the establishment of an organized healthcare system. Major cities saw the establishment of hospitals and clinics, which were placed under the supervision of the recently formed Health Department. The Health Department, which subsequently became the General Directorate for Health and Aid (GDHA), was connected to the Attorney General's Bureau as part of the government's zeal and resolve to create a well-organized and efficient healthcare system. In order to improve healthcare services and manage diseases in Saudi Arabia, a Health Council led by the Attorney General was formed. The lack of funding hindered efforts to create a modern healthcare system in Saudi Arabia, despite the country's officials' best efforts to standardize and modernize its healthcare system³.

With the founding of the Ministry of Health in 1954, the Saudi Arabian health system underwent a full and comprehensive overhaul. The general oversight of healthcare facilities, whether in the public or private sectors, falls within the purview of the Ministry of Health. The Saudi government launched the nation's first five-year National Development Plan in 1970 to encourage development in a number of areas, including healthcare, as a result of the rise in revenue from the sale of crude oil. The Saudi healthcare system underwent a major transition during this time and under subsequent National Development Plans, as the government was able to set up the facilities needed for primary healthcare, hospitals, and

research institutes. Even though the nation depends on foreign medical professionals to staff these enlarged healthcare facilities, it has made significant investments in the development of human resources by offering Saudis scholarships to pursue professions in medicine⁴.

Health Services Development Overview

Over the past few decades, Saudi Arabia's health services have substantially expanded and improved. A royal proclamation from King Abdulaziz led to the establishment of the first public health department in Mexico City in 1925. This department set up several hospitals and dispensaries and was in charge of funding and supervising free medical care for the populace and pilgrims. The majority of people continued to rely on traditional medicine, and the incidence of epidemic diseases remained high among the populace and pilgrims, despite the fact that it was a significant first step toward the provision of curative health services. The national income was insufficient to achieve significant advancements in health care. The creation of the MOH in 1950 by another royal decree was the next significant development⁵. Twenty years later, the government unveiled the 5-year development plans, which aim to enhance every aspect of the country, including the Saudi healthcare system. Substantial advancements in Saudi Arabia's healthcare system have been made since then.

Health Insurance in Saudi Arabia

One of the MOH's main challenges is finding the money to provide health care services. The government is under a great deal of financial strain because it pays for all public health services, which are provided at no cost. This is especially true given the population's rapid growth, the high cost of new technology, and the public's growing awareness of health issues. The government established the Council for Cooperative Health Insurance in 1999 to satisfy the increasing demands of the public for health care and to guarantee the quality of services rendered. This Council's primary responsibility is to establish, oversee, and manage a health insurance plan for the Saudi medical industry⁵.

Three phases were proposed for the introduction of a cooperative health insurance program. Initially, Saudis and non-Saudis working in the private sector were required to enroll in a cooperative health insurance plan, with their employers covering the cost of health coverage. For Saudis and non-Saudis employed in the public sector, the cooperative health insurance program is to be applied for in the second phase. For this type of employee, the government will cover the cooperative health insurance premiums. Eventually, other groups—like pilgrims—will also be covered by the cooperative health insurance program⁶. As of right now, only the first phase of the cooperative health insurance program—which is being progressively introduced to private sector employees and their dependents over the course of three phases—has been put into place. Employers with 500 or more workers were covered by the first phase, while those with more than 100 workers were covered by the second. Workers from all Saudi Arabian firms as well as domestic laborers were included in the third phase⁷. In order to privatize state-owned healthcare institutions, the government is currently methodically implementing the final two stages for pilgrims and government sector

personnel. The Saudi Arabian population's cooperative health insurance program, which is only open to employees and foreigners, is currently unknown.

In 2004, there was just one business in the Saudi Arabian market for cooperative health insurance; today, there are roughly 25 companies involved. The goal of the program's inception is to lessen Saudi Arabia's financial load from the expenses of providing health care at no cost. Additionally, it will provide individuals with greater freedom to select the medical treatments they need. In Saudi Arabia, introducing a comprehensive, equitable, and reasonably priced service for the entire populace is the real problem facing policymakers. It is obvious that there are lessons to be learnt from other nations' experiences, including the benefits and drawbacks of various programs⁸.

METHODOLOGY

The study's foundation is desk research data gathered from the MOH portal in Saudi Arabia. Additional information was gathered from the World Health Organization (WHO) portal in order to determine Saudi Arabia's health system profile and the significance of the country's medical staff. We also looked into the cost-effectiveness of Saudi Arabia's healthcare system on the World Economic Forum website. In addition, we looked for articles about healthcare services in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by searching the PubMed and Taylor & Francis article databases in addition to a variety of journals, newspapers, and magazines as well as the websites of particular healthcare providers. A substantial amount of data has been gathered, enabling proper research analysis, collecting, interpretation, and organization. Therefore, the material that is currently available is studied in an effort to evaluate the healthcare services in KSA.

RESULTS

Seldom has any fresh research been conducted to evaluate the evolution of the KSA healthcare systems. Additionally, the study indicates that the population of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will increase at the quickest rate in the Gulf. The budgetary allotment for the advancement of the healthcare sector is anticipated to rise over time as a result of the ambitious Saudi Vision 2030 plan, which would affect the accessibility of healthcare services for the average person. Maternal and newborn mortality will continue to decline, while life expectancy will rise. The infection rate per thousand persons will continue to drop even in the face of the threat posed by modern diseases such as Middle East respiratory syndrome.

Over the next ten years, there will be a decrease in population growth, although the percentage of those under 25 will still rise.

The healthcare systems are about to be privatized, which means that the efficiency savings from using robots will become more apparent soon. There would be more hospitals and medical beds available.

According to the research, both in the public and commercial sectors, the proportion of foreign healthcare human resources would decline while the number of Saudi physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and other support workers would rise.

It is important to note that the study discovered that the Saudi Vision 2030 plan will result in higher healthcare service income. In the foreseeable future, health insurance would become more widely available to Saudi citizens, which would boost profits for health insurance consolidates.

Moreover, PHC would advance under the National Transformational Plan 2030, automation would become a reality, and healthcare professional training and development would take center stage. Quality management tools would be institutionalized alongside the introduction of advanced performance management systems.

According to the study, in order to create a blended service delivery system, public-private healthcare collaborations should be carefully considered on a worldwide scale. Healthcare systems should be affordable and imaginative, like basic mobile applications that could aid in the eradication of disease by educating people about preventative measures. Development policies for healthcare systems should be dynamic and inventive.

The researchers firmly draw the conclusion that the healthcare industry will be affected by the practical and policy consequences of their research.

An examination of Saudi Arabia's past, present, and future healthcare systems can shed light on the development and future prospects of the nation's healthcare system.

For the healthcare sector

The Kingdom's healthcare industry is expanding quickly, but research suggests that a bed shortage is likely in the near future. Both the public and commercial sectors of the healthcare industry should take immediate action to address this problem. They should use the funds provided to build new hospitals as well as expand and improve the ones that already exist. Information technology should be used in conjunction with other contemporary technical developments like robotics, as these will have a big impact on the prevention and management of communicable illnesses. In the face of rising healthcare expenses, public and private healthcare service providers must collaborate to offer better healthcare services⁹.

For the government

The transformation of healthcare should begin with the government standardizing the industry. In order to further improve service capabilities, initiatives should also be taken to restructure the financing of the healthcare system such that it is dependent on "payment of service" rather than the government budget¹⁰. In order to boost the proportion of skilled Saudi professionals working in the healthcare industry, the government ought to allocate funds for the establishment of medical and nursing colleges. The study also reveals that while the number of infections per thousand people is decreasing, the number of diseases linked to a certain lifestyle is rising. Therefore, the government ought to be heavily involved in preventing the spread of these illnesses by educating the public and coordinating various awareness initiatives¹¹.

Old System (Pre-2000s)

- The government provided the majority of the funding for Saudi Arabia's mainly decentralized healthcare system.
- Due to the concentration of hospitals and clinics in metropolitan regions, there are differences in access to healthcare.
- Healthcare services were of varying quality, and in order to meet demand, foreign healthcare professionals were brought in.
- There was little health insurance coverage, and paying for medical care out of pocket was usual.
- In general, the system encountered difficulties with personnel, infrastructure, and the provision of healthcare.

Current System (2000s-2021)

- The establishment of the Saudi Health Council and the Health Transformation Program (HTP) in the early 2000s marked a significant change.
- Through infrastructure, personnel development, and healthcare IT investments, the HTP sought to modernize and enhance the healthcare system.
- Although the main source of funding for the healthcare industry continued to be government grants, the industry saw significant expansion, including the opening of new hospitals and medical schools.
- Additionally, the Kingdom made health insurance mandatory for workers in the private sector.
- Increased organization and efficiency in the healthcare system, with a focus on research and quality improvement.

Future System (Post-2021)

- Saudi Arabia's healthcare system can continue to expand and change in the future.
- The Kingdom's ambitious development strategy, Vision 2030, prioritizes the healthcare industry. It sees an ecosystem for healthcare that is more varied and sophisticated, with a bigger role for the private sector.
- Initiatives in eHealth and telemedicine are anticipated to grow, improving access to medical care, particularly in rural areas.
- It seems probable that the government will persist in funding medical education and training in an effort to lessen dependency on foreign healthcare experts.
- Preventive and primary healthcare may receive more attention, with an emphasis on illness prevention and health promotion.
- Decision-making in healthcare and patient care may be improved by further integrating data analytics, artificial intelligence, and electronic health records.
- More competition and innovation in the delivery of healthcare could result from the growth of the private sector and health insurance.

Challenges and areas of focus for the future system may include

- Reducing healthcare inequalities and guaranteeing fair access in all areas.
- Handling the elderly and expanding population's healthcare needs.
- Creating healthcare infrastructure in accordance with the objectives of Vision 2030.
- Encouraging public-private collaborations to increase healthcare innovation and investment.

Especially in the previous 20 years, Saudi Arabia has significantly improved and modernized its healthcare system. The objectives stated in Vision 2030, which prioritize innovation, quality, and sustainability, are probably going to have a significant impact on the nation's healthcare system in the future. Nevertheless, continued work will be necessary to resolve issues and guarantee that all inhabitants have access to high-quality healthcare services.

CONCLUSION

The Saudi Arabian healthcare system has advanced significantly, and its trajectory suggests that it will continue to do so. Modernizing healthcare is a significant part of a larger effort to raise Saudi people's standard of living in general. With sustained investment, ingenuity, and an emphasis on diversity, Saudi Arabia's healthcare system is expected to become a global and regional model.

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