David Hadley, CEO – Mediclinic Middle East



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Mediclinic Middle East's CEO David Hadley explains the UAE's response to the pandemic and how Mediclinic was involved. He also discusses the oversupply of hospitals and other healthcare trends in the region.

We interviewed you back in 2019 to discuss your future plans which must have changed significantly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Can you reflect back on the past two years and what they were like for you and Mediclinic?

Mediclinic was in a fortunate position due to the fact that we were not over leveraged, our cash position was also strong, so we did not have to lay off any staff, decrease salaries, or take any other drastic measures; we were able to weather the storm while simultaneously providing significant assistance to the country in managing the pandemic. It was obviously quite frightening when the pandemic started but fortunately we have a good data analytics team, and thus had a good idea of what was coming, we were prepared, had the ability to make decisions fast, and had the right people in the right places.

As you mentioned, the UAE’s response to the pandemic was impressive as well as their ability to make decisions fast and bring everyone together. So, as a seasoned executive, can you reflect on some initiatives that Mediclinic has been doing with the

UAE government and their response overall?

We were first and foremost able to assist the government in managing the pandemic, we were part of the command centre discussions which guided the way we handled the situations. We converted hospitals into low acute hospitals, added significant ICU capacity and were the first provider to set up drive through PCR stations. We also assisted the government with the distribution and administration of vaccines. We set up a telemedicine service and supported this by setting up a pharmacy home delivery business (our drivers were no longer driving people around). We also completed the acquisition of the remaining shares of Bourn Hall, with its leading IVF facilities. We added a sports rehabilitation centre under the Mediclinic Perform brand and next month we will open our first dedicated cosmetic facility in the Dubai Mall under the “Enhance” brand. We also acquired a home healthcare business and additionally, we have opened about 40 long term care beds over the last couple of years.

You mentioned during our interview in 2019 that there is an oversupply of hospitals. There are several hospital chains constructing new hospitals and speciality hospitals. What are your thoughts concerning this situation?

I still think that there is an oversupply of hospitals in the market, the reason I state this is whilst the population is growing and ageing, healthcare is migrating through innovation and better treatment plans, resulting in patients staying in hospital beds for shorter periods and receiving treatment in other settings (like home health). Essentially, we already had enough hospitals and a few of the newer ones were not yet open at the beginning of the pandemic. For a couple of years to come, the population is growing, the government and the country are progressing, visa rules are changing, etc. If the UAE follows the same trajectory, there will still be an oversupply for some time.

Do you consider this a threat to Mediclinic, and to your performance this year? How do you ensure that people are cared for at Mediclinic?

Mediclinic is confident that our patients are loyal to the medical brand and that our staff and doctors are also loyal to us. Most people resonate with the values of our organisation. They know that the company is well run; we put the patient first, we are ethical, we do not have any major debt issues, fraud, etc. People know that they will be well looked after within Mediclinic.

What are the other market opportunities and trends that will transform the healthcare sector in UAE?

The pandemic encouraged people to focus more on their health in one way or another. This creates the opportunity for a bigger focus on preventative care. We will obviously approach this very scientifically and thus decided to invest in a precision medicine laboratory. This will enable us to understand an individual's genome, microbiome etc, to provide more individual treatment plans. We also added a sleep laboratory and, as mentioned previously, added Mediclinic perform to assist with mobility. A change in the age profile of the UAE population will probably create more geriatric care and other healthcare opportunities related to the older population.

Many investments are being made in UAE and in Saudi Arabia for clinical trials, specifically in Abu Dhabi with Mubadala and G42. Is this something of interest to Mediclinic?

Yes, and it is something we already do. Research projects are continuously running throughout the company and every year we have a dedicated research day where we award winners throughout our organisation. We partnered with the Mohammed Bin Rashid University (MBRU) in Dubai, and in Abu Dhabi we work closely with the teams at various universities such as UAE University, Sheikh Khalifa University, the Fatima College, etc. Research is a big pillar of our healthcare offering as we continuously strive for improvement.

What do you think needs to happen in the region to bring more clinical research to the country?

Most of the data around the world that is being used for clinical research is based on Western populations. We have more than 200 different nationalities working in the UAE and they all have different genome profiles. That data will only improve research programs and the availability of solutions. The government is already focussed on bringing more international data providers, coders and analysts into the country to help us provide better outcomes.

Mediclinic was chosen as one of the top three best companies to work for by its staff. What does this recognition mean to you? What is your recipe for talent retention?

It is great to be ranked the number one healthcare company in the UAE by our staff. Our staff turnover is extremely low. We do not struggle to retain people or to attract people to our company. We announced an Emiratisation program about a year ago where we pledged to employ 1,000 Emiratis and that has been quite an interesting journey. I think the key is that our values, which are lived by our leadership team, are attractive to staff.

What are the challenges that you foresee with the years to come besides HCP retention or training? Are there any other challenges that you see for hospitals?

Inflation is going to be a problem when it comes to pricing in the healthcare system. People need to understand that 70% of our costs are salaries and if we cannot pay the employees more, they will leave and work elsewhere, even in other countries, which is increasingly becoming a problem. I still however think there are more opportunities than challenges in this market. So, I am very excited about what the medium and short term holds, specifically in this region.

Where do you think Mediclinic will be in three years' time?

I think the hospital will expand beyond the walls of the hospital so you will be able to deliver health care anywhere. For example, telemedicine across a video camera which wasn't even a factor five years ago. We are going to see hospitals evolve to manage people's lifestyles rather than just cure problems to ensure that they live longer and have a healthier way of life.

To conclude you mentioned that hospitals should imitate you in certain respects. What do you think other hospitals could learn from Mediclinic?

The UAE allows for a competitive healthcare landscape which brings about innovation, efficiency, and improved patient outcomes. So whilst we continuously learn from other providers, I think all providers must ensure that they deliver ethical healthcare, it is important for the longevity of the whole healthcare ecosystem. The staff have to also feel like they belong, and they too need to be ethical and trustworthy for patients to be treated in the correct and appropriate manner. We focus on that point here at Mediclinic, we have signs on every single one of our facilities, telling the patients that we encourage ethical behaviour in the company.

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