

Jorge A. Guzman - CEO, Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi



The UAE has the right ecosystem; it is one of the few places in the world that is positioned to leapfrog significantly in healthcare

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Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi ranks as the UAE's best hospital, in the top 150 globally, and recently opened a new comprehensive state-of-the-art cancer centre. CEO Dr Jorge A. Guzman outlines how the hospital's focus on providing complex, quality, patient-centric care is a key differentiator, its role in raising standards of care across the country and region, and its potential as a key node in the UAE's positioning as a medical tourism destination.

Having developed your career primarily in the US, six years ago, you moved across the world to Abu Dhabi to begin a new challenge. Can you talk about the rationale behind this decision?

In October 2017, I took on the Chief of Staff role at Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi and became CEO almost two and a half years ago. When I was still in the United States, Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi always seemed like an intriguing project, and I was familiar with its inception and growth. Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi opened to patients in 2015, and I got the call to come to Abu Dhabi in the early stages of the journey in 2017. Of course, at that time, everything was much smaller in terms of magnitude and scale, but the appeal was to be part of a project that could change the healthcare landscape and have a longstanding impact here in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and in the region.

The aim of the project was to mirror the Cleveland Clinic US healthcare model in the UAE. We worked together with our stakeholders, Cleveland Clinic in the US and the Department of Health – Abu Dhabi, establishing the foundations for modern healthcare delivery in the Emirate.

Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi was recently ranked the country’s best hospital and is in the top 150 globally. How has the clinic grown, and what is the footprint and scale of the organization today?

Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi employs over 5,000 caregivers. We have about 450 doctors, over 1,200 nurses, and approximately 450 allied healthcare providers, such as dietitians, respiratory therapists, and other support services. Since we opened to patients, we have completed a little over 4.2 million outpatient visits, conducted over 134,000 surgical procedures, and more than 78,000 inpatient discharges.

Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi became the first hospital in the UAE and second in the Middle East region to be accredited by Magnet. We are proud to be the youngest organization to receive such a designation in the history of the accreditation – an accolade that is highly sought after – for recognizing nursing excellence in clinical care. We have been accredited by the Joint Commission International (JCI) for the third consecutive time since 2016. Additionally, we received the Arab Federation Climate Change Award for our sustainability initiatives and for aligning our sustainability targets with the COP28 agenda.

Recently, we opened the Fatima bint Mubarak Center, a comprehensive state-of-the-art cancer centre, modeled after the Taussig Cancer Center in Cleveland Clinic in the US and which has received the LEED Gold certification from the United States Green Building Council. It is designed from a patient-centred perspective, with every specialty required for the treatment of cancer, located in one place. Our building layout and model of care were designed with input from the patients—both cancer survivors and their families, with consideration of their preferences in ambience, furniture, and patient workflows.

The centre boasts of state-of-the-art technology including the only adaptive radiotherapy machine in the UAE. It is one of the few in the world that uses artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to speed up radiation therapy while reducing exposure to radiation.

The mission of Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi is to cater to the complex healthcare needs of the UAE. We were brought to Abu Dhabi to bring the care that patients were previously travelling overseas

to receive. We are the first and only multiorgan transplant centre in the country and have one of the few transplant programs in the region, with over 400 transplants performed to date. We have the largest cardiac surgery program and the first and largest neuroscience program. It continues to be a remarkable journey.

The UAE's hospital sector is characterized by a high level of saturation and competition, with an oversupply of general hospitals and hospital beds, following the economic boom of the early to mid-2010s and the subsequent slowdown in more recent years. Has Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi's development been based on a strategy of developing new concepts or bringing those already in place in Ohio to the UAE?

What differentiates Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi is its focus on providing complex, quality, patient-centric care. Our approach has a heavy emphasis on quality outcomes, supported by research and education. These are the three pillars of Cleveland Clinic US as well. It has been our mission for 100 years, and it continues to serve us well.

We have brought many firsts to the UAE, proudly contributing to the advancement of healthcare, and the standard of care in the country. The hospital's first multiorgan transplant centre and the advanced dedicated cancer centre in the UAE are just two of the developments Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi has contributed to healthcare in the UAE. In some cases, we have spearheaded treatments or procedures that have not been done even in the US or other parts of the world, such as bringing adaptive radiation therapy to our cancer patients as a first for the global Cleveland Clinic enterprise and for the UAE and region.

Our strength in research and influential partnerships with key stakeholders has enabled us to address some of the most complex health concerns in the community through various means like public health awareness, community events, and virtual seminars. An example of this is our strong alignment with the government's focus on precision medicine and a personalized approach to patient care.

How are you integrating key global trends, such as digitalization, into your work?

There are two things that we know will be part of the future of healthcare delivery, one is personalization, and the second will be the use of digital technology. Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi is preparing for how the model of care may evolve in five or 10 years and we are aware that

technology will be leveraged to monitor patients' health in real-time, and in the delivery of clinical interventions. Personalization will drive hospital visits in the future. Also, enhanced patient data and AI decision support will provide insights for diagnosis and the care plan.

Patients and caregivers will be supported by emotional AI, with robots and AI assisting in conducting medical procedures. Ultimately, this will lead to the use of augmented reality robotics, and what is known as the 'hospital at home' and virtual care teams. The population of patients in the hospital will look different. Hospitals will predominantly serve very sick patients, and some patients treated in hospitals today will be managed at home in the future.

Our work now is to understand how we can integrate these findings into the delivery of care, and how our workforce will change around these advancements. At Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi, we pride ourselves on being innovators in the delivery of healthcare and working to stay ahead of the game.

Mubadala Health, Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi's main shareholder, has highlighted greater integration between its facilities as an important next step in driving collaboration and better patient outcomes. How does that integration play into your operations?

The opportunity for us is to leverage the dynamic network of assets that are part of Mubadala Health, and economies of scale, to ensure that we become increasingly efficient over time and facilitate access to the best care for our patients. An additional opportunity is a flow of referrals of patients across the network so that we can serve the right patient in the right place. With the recent launch of M42, a first-of-its-kind, tech-enabled, integrated healthcare company created through the coming together of G42 Healthcare and Mubadala Health, we will have the advancements of technology, data, and genomic data more easily accessible, which will only benefit our patients. This will allow us to personalize care, advance precision medicine, and continue to lead in innovations.

What does the patient population within Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi look like today?

Today, 75 percent of our patients are from the emirate of Abu Dhabi, 20 percent come from other emirates and five percent of our patients come from international destinations, predominantly in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. We have seen the percentage of international

patients grow, post-COVID-19. In fact, we saw a 43 percent rise in international patients during the first half of 2023 compared to the same period in 2022. Those patients are looking for specific, complex care services, such as cancer treatment, and cardiac surgery with sophisticated and advanced treatment and procedures.

For international patients, the appeal of Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi is a combination of its location, convenience of proximity to home, medical expertise, top clinical outcomes, and state-of-the-art facility and technology. Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi provides plenty of hospitality space so that families can visit if their family member is receiving treatment for extended periods, for example in the case of cancer or transplantation.

How do you plan to advertise your facilities to further attract international patients?

We pride ourselves on having world-renowned doctors, who are known by their colleagues, and refer their patients to us. Word-of-mouth is a powerful marketing tool, and our many success stories speak volumes for the expertise patients receive at Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi. The clinical outcomes of our complex service lines are well-known amongst local facilities, providers and the wider region. Insurance companies are starting to refer patients or have established contracts with us to ensure that we treat patients with complex needs. Our partnership with Mubadala Health further strengthens our position in healthcare in the UAE and region, while our proximity to other Gulf countries attracts patients in the region who would otherwise go abroad for treatment. Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi offers competitive pricing compared to top institutions in the world, with some of the best patient outcomes.

Our multidisciplinary care is one of the key factors that differentiates Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi. A patient is attended to by multiple physicians from different specialties, under one roof. We see that this is particularly advantageous to those patients with complex needs. One of our core values, teamwork, also differentiates us. Since its inception, Cleveland Clinic has operated as a multispecialty group practice that works in multidisciplinary teams to ensure that we bring the best of our collective knowledge and expertise when taking care of the patient.

What is the make-up of your team of doctors and nurses? Is it very international, or mostly local staff?

The vast majority of our doctors were trained in the US and a significant number of them are from Europe, particularly the U.K., Spain, and Italy, while some of them are from the local region.

Identifying and fostering emerging UAE national talent is a key part of Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi's commitment to providing the region with world-class healthcare and developing a sustainable healthcare sector, in line with the government's Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030.

Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi offers extensive training and development opportunities to create dynamic career pathways for UAE nationals across all levels of the organization. Career succession planning, mentoring, and training programs are designed and facilitated to encourage a high level of caregiver engagement and retention.

The Wateen program was developed to provide university graduates with a structured learning experience to focus on hospital and healthcare system practice. The graduate program offers suitably qualified UAE nationals the opportunity to pursue careers in both clinical (nursing and allied health) and non-clinical areas such as HR, IT and finance.

Is the recruitment process straightforward in terms of attracting people to come and work in the UAE?

Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi is an established hospital in the UAE, twice ranked as number one in the country, and once as a top hospital regionally by *Newsweek*, which has made it a huge magnet for attracting top talent.

You have been in Abu Dhabi for six years, two years as CEO, and a lot has been achieved in that time. What are the next milestones?

The next milestone for Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi is to continue to drive high standards of practice, to be renowned for excellence in clinical outcomes, research and education, and continue to rise in the ranking of 'best hospitals' in the world. The goal remains to provide world-class care to the people of the UAE and patients from all over the world.

You mentioned that M42 will help you thrive even more in the future, for example, with advanced precision medicines. Can you expand on what you plan to achieve in the next

two to three years, and in which specific areas?

The UAE has the right ecosystem; it is one of the few places in the world that is positioned to leapfrog significantly in healthcare. So, I think what lies ahead is the full utilization of that ecosystem from the perspective of our stakeholders. Through the Emirati Genome Program, we have 400,000 fully sequenced individuals in the UAE, with plans for every UAE national to have a full genome sequence in the next few months. This combination of data, support from the government, and advancements in knowledge will lead to more research, a better understanding of the conditions unique to the Emirati population, and the development of new ways to treat health conditions prevalent here in the UAE.

Do you have a final message for our international audience?

It is perhaps one of the greatest opportunities for me as a healthcare provider to be a part of Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi. The UAE is a very progressive country, with a wise leadership that has a vision to establish itself as the best in the world—and at a fast pace. This is evident in the milestones accomplished so far, not just in healthcare, but across other sectors. The UAE's high standard of living, family-friendly infrastructure, and inclusive and diverse society create an ideal environment for professional growth and success.

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