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If you believe in the potential of this region, now is the time to invest, engage closely with stakeholders, and become an integral part of its growth story

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Maher Abouzeid outlines Medserve's role as a healthcare projects incubator, focusing on identifying and filling gaps in healthcare services across the Middle East & Africa region. Their hands-on approach includes conducting market assessments, securing funding, and assembling operational teams. Abouzeid also explains the company's latest venture, Ardens Health, the first private facility in the region to offer comprehensive services for mental health and substance use disorders.

Can you provide an overview of MedServe's evolution since its inception, particularly focusing on the development of your latest venture, Ardens Health?

MedServe is a healthcare projects incubator, we identify and fill needs or gaps in the Healthcare services offered in countries around Middle East & Africa. At MedServe, we take a hands-on approach, from conducting thorough market assessments and feasibility studies to securing funding and financing to assembling the right operational & clinical team. We shepherd projects from conception to fruition and our commitment doesn't end there; we stay invested for five to seven years, nurturing these ventures into sustainable successes.

Our latest venture, Ardens Health, addresses a critical gap in the market for Behavioral Health services. It will be the first private facility in the region to offer comprehensive services for Mental Health and Substance use Disorders. With facilities planned across the Middle East and Africa,

including Dubai, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, we aim to provide state-of-the-art care to meet the growing demand for these services, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since our last meeting, what do you identify as the most significant dynamics in the Saudi healthcare space?

I've been deeply engaged & involved in the Saudi Healthcare market for the past 28 years, initially as a medical technology provider through couple of leading multinationals and more recently as an investor and entrepreneur focusing on healthcare opportunities. From this vantage point, I see Saudi Arabia making significant strides toward its Vision 2030 goals. Despite some skepticism, two key factors stand out: projected population growth and the imperative to improve healthcare services.

The Saudi government aims to double the population by 2050, with plans to increase Riyadh's population to 15 million by 2030. This demographic shift underscores the pressing need to enhance healthcare infrastructure. Currently, the healthcare system predominantly focuses on treating illness rather than promoting wellness. However, there's a growing recognition that a shift towards preventive care is essential to meet the evolving needs of a larger population.

As part of Vision 2030, the Kingdom set ambitious targets to improve life expectancy, aiming to increase it from 76.8 years to 81.8 years by 2050. Achieving this goal requires significant investment in healthcare systems, processes, and services to ensure that our healthcare system evolves in tandem with the population's needs.

When discussing healthcare objectives, it's crucial to shift our focus beyond merely extending lifespan to ensuring those added years are lived in good health and vitality. Consider this scenario: What purpose does it serve to elongate someone's life from, say, 76 to 81 if those extra years are marred by suffering and immobility? Quality of life becomes the paramount concern here. Thus, the emphasis shifts towards not just increasing lifespan, but augmenting the number of healthy, active years. This perspective offers a nuanced evaluation of a healthcare system's effectiveness coupled with prevention & early detection.

In the context of Saudi Arabia, there has been a notable transition in the healthcare landscape. Historically reliant on public sector, the country has progressively integrated the private sector into its healthcare framework over the past decade. This strategic shift, spearheaded by initiatives such as the comprehensive digitization of medical records through a Health information System, has

fundamentally transformed the healthcare infrastructure. By centralizing patient data and streamlining information access, this digital transformation has facilitated more informed decision-making and resource allocation.

Moreover, the adoption of data-driven approaches, exemplified by the establishment of a healthcare command centre akin to those seen in high-stakes operations like space missions, has proven pivotal, particularly during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This centralized monitoring system allows for real-time tracking of key healthcare metrics across the nation, admissions, discharges, vaccine distribution, and supply chain logistics, enabling proactive responses to emerging challenges.

Looking ahead, Saudi Arabia is poised to embrace a patient centered healthcare model under the auspices of the Ministry of Health. This paradigm shift aims to ensure universal access to healthcare while incentivizing outcome-based practices. A cornerstone of this approach is the establishment of a National Insurance Company, slated to provide comprehensive coverage to all Saudi nationals by 2025. This shift towards outcome-based reimbursement models represents a departure from traditional fee-for-service structures, encouraging healthcare providers to prioritize patient outcomes over volume of services rendered.

Furthermore, as part of this transition, the Ministry of Health will play a regulatory role while a newly created Health Holding Company (HHC) will be in charge of delivering medical services & care through health clusters with a plans to outsource the operation of over 300 public hospitals to private operators in the coming years. This strategic move not only expands the role of the private sector in healthcare delivery but also fosters competition and innovation within the sector, ultimately enhancing the quality and efficiency of healthcare services available to the Saudi population.

Saudi Arabia’s healthcare system is undergoing a paradigm shift towards a more holistic, patient-centric approach. Through strategic investments in digital infrastructure, data-driven decision-making, and market-oriented reforms, the country is poised to usher in a new era of healthcare delivery that ensures both longevity and vitality for its citizens.

Could you elaborate on the concept of healthcare clusters and their significance within the Saudi healthcare system?

Healthcare clusters in Saudi Arabia represent a strategic approach to organising and managing healthcare resources based on geographical location, population density, and the availability of medical facilities. Essentially, clusters are formed by grouping together hospitals and primary care clinics within a defined area. For instance, a cluster might comprise one major hospital, several smaller hospitals, and numerous primary care clinics, each operating with its own budget and resources.

The rationale behind clustering is multifaceted. Firstly, it allows for a more efficient allocation of resources by consolidating healthcare services within a specific geographic area. This approach streamlines administrative processes, enhances coordination among healthcare providers, and ultimately improves the delivery of care to patients.

Moreover, clustering enables the implementation of a performance-based model wherein each cluster is entrusted to an operator, often from the private sector, responsible for its management. This introduces a system of accountability whereby operators are held responsible for achieving predefined outcomes, such as improved patient outcomes and cost-effectiveness.

This initiative reflects Saudi Arabia’s commitment to innovation and efficiency in healthcare delivery. Rather than adopting wholesale models from other countries, the Saudi Ministry of Health has taken a pragmatic approach, drawing on best practices from various healthcare systems worldwide and adapting them to suit local needs and conditions.

Furthermore, the clustering approach aligns with broader strategic objectives aimed at addressing the challenges posed by population growth and escalating healthcare costs. By harnessing the expertise and efficiency of the private sector, Saudi Arabia seeks to enhance the quality of care while containing expenditure, thus ensuring sustainable healthcare provision for its citizens.

In addition to clustering, the Ministry of Health has also prioritized preventive healthcare measures as part of its long-term strategy. Recognizing the limitations of a healthcare system focused solely on treating illness, efforts are underway to shift towards a proactive model that emphasises prevention, early detection, and home-based care.

Moreover, to address the growing demand for healthcare professionals, particularly doctors and nurses, Saudi Arabia has embarked on initiatives to attract and retain domestic talent. By investing in training programs and expanding opportunities for female healthcare professionals, the country aims to build a robust and diverse workforce capable of meeting the evolving needs of its population.

Healthcare clusters represent a cornerstone of Saudi Arabia’s healthcare reform efforts, embodying a holistic approach to healthcare delivery that emphasises efficiency, accountability, and innovation. Through initiatives such as clustering, preventive healthcare, and talent development, the Kingdom is laying the foundation for a resilient and patient-centric healthcare system that can adapt and thrive in the face of future challenges.

Considering the various initiatives and reforms underway in Saudi Arabia’s healthcare sector, how does MedServe envision its role in contributing to this transformation and collaborating with different stakeholders?

the evolving landscape of healthcare in Saudi Arabia presents a multitude of opportunities for collaboration and innovation. At MedServe, we recognise the imperative of partnership in navigating these changes and driving meaningful progress in healthcare delivery.

As we delve into projects aimed at enhancing the healthcare system’s efficiency and effectiveness, our approach is anchored in the ethos of partnership. We understand that no single entity possesses all the requisite expertise and resources to effect transformative change independently. Therefore, building robust networks and consortia becomes paramount.

In the context of Saudi Arabia’s healthcare transformation, we perceive ourselves as facilitators, bringing together diverse stakeholders – from technology providers and investors to operators and clinical experts – to form cohesive alliances. These partnerships are instrumental in addressing the multifaceted challenges facing the healthcare sector and unlocking synergies that drive innovation and efficiency.

Central to our collaboration efforts is the concept of Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), which represents a paradigm shift in how healthcare services are delivered and managed. By fostering collaboration between the public and private sectors, PPP projects have the potential to leverage the strengths of each party – the public sector’s scale and patient volume, coupled with the private sector’s expertise and efficiency.

However, it’s essential to recognise that the success of PPP initiatives hinges on the project’s viability and bankability. Ensuring that projects are structured in a manner that is attractive to investors and aligns with their financial objectives is critical. This necessitates meticulous attention to detail in crafting agreements and delineating responsibilities, as well as a deep understanding of the market dynamics and regulatory landscape to deliver sustainable and superior clinical

outcome.

In this regard, we are committed to supporting the Ministry of Health in its efforts to revamp and transform healthcare delivery models. By leveraging our expertise in areas such as dialysis services, primary care clinics, and chronic disease management, we aim to complement the government's initiatives and contribute to improving healthcare outcomes for the Saudi population.

Ultimately, our success lies in our ability to deliver on our promises, demonstrate tangible outcomes, and build credibility as a trusted partner in Saudi Arabia's healthcare journey. By aligning our vision with the broader objectives of the government and collaborating effectively with stakeholders across the ecosystem, we are confident in our ability to drive positive change and make a meaningful impact on the health and well-being of the Saudi populace.

Do you have any closing remarks for our international audience?

I'd like to emphasize the transformative opportunities present in the Middle East, particularly in countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia. This region is undergoing unprecedented growth and development across various sectors, including healthcare. The massive investments being made in restructuring and building new systems present unparalleled opportunities for businesses and professionals alike. It's a once-in-a-lifetime chance to be part of this transformative journey. If you believe in the potential of this region, now is the time to invest, engage closely with stakeholders, and become an integral part of its growth story.

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