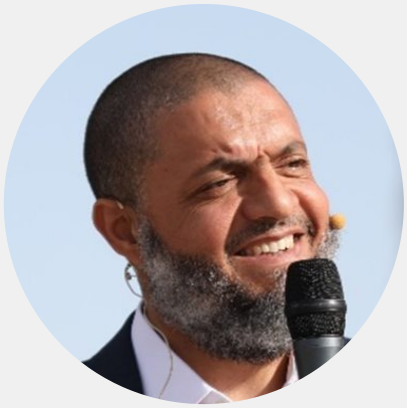
Mohammed Saleh – Health Director, Microsoft EMEA



Technology alone cannot drive transformation; it requires an ecosystem of innovation, strategic partnerships, and purpose-driven execution

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Saudi Arabia is rapidly emerging as a leader in digital healthcare, where AI, cloud computing, and data-driven solutions are reshaping the industry. Mohammed Saleh, Health Director Part of Microsoft EMEA, shares how Microsoft is driving this transformation – enhancing patient care, streamlining operations, and enabling AI-powered clinical advancements. With a datacenter region investment in Saudi Arabia and strategic partnerships across the sector, the focus is no longer on adaptation but acceleration.

How has your career at Microsoft evolved, and what are your key responsibilities as Health Director for EMEA?

Over the past two decades at Microsoft, my career has been dedicated to advancing digital transformation in healthcare. As Health Director, part of the EMEA Health, Pharmaceutical and Life Sciences team, I lead the regional health industry advisory, ensuring that Microsoft's technology solutions are effectively integrated to modernize healthcare systems, enhance patient experiences, and drive operational efficiencies. My role involves working closely with governments, healthcare providers, and industry stakeholders to align our digital capabilities with the evolving needs of the sector, adapting global innovations to the unique challenges of diverse markets.

Before assuming this position, I led Microsoft's healthcare strategy in the Middle East and Africa, playing a crucial role in accelerating digital adoption, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prior to that, I was based in Seattle, overseeing global Go-To-Market (GTM) strategies for Microsoft's healthcare solutions, with a focus on ensuring their applicability in emerging markets such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, and Egypt. Given the disparities in infrastructure, connectivity, and digital readiness, a key aspect of my work was tailoring technology to be both practical and scalable in environments where solutions are not always directly transferable.

My early career was equally shaped by large-scale digital transformation initiatives. I played a pivotal role in designing Egypt's national IT and digital health strategy, which I had the opportunity to present at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Additionally, I participated in the implementation of Egypt's national health insurance system, a project aimed at covering one hundred million beneficiaries and redefining healthcare accessibility through digital innovation. My experience also extends to the deployment of electronic medical records and hospital management systems, notably at institutions such as King Fahd Medical City, King Khaled Eye Specialist Hospital (KKESH) and General Organization for Social Insurance (GOSI) in Saudi Arabia.

Prior to joining Microsoft, I spent 13 years at IBM/SBM, where I specialized in healthcare IT solutions, overseeing the implementation of critical infrastructure to support digital health advancements. My background in both technology and healthcare, combined with a master's degree in computer science, has allowed me to bridge the gap between innovation and real-world healthcare challenges. Beyond my corporate role, I have also contributed to academia as an assistant lecturer in computer science at Ain Shams University, reinforcing my commitment to shaping the future of digital healthcare through both industry and education.

How is Microsoft advancing digital transformation in healthcare across EMEA, particularly in Saudi Arabia?

Healthcare across EMEA is undergoing a profound digital transformation, particularly in the Gulf states, where governments are prioritizing modernization. However, healthcare is not a monolithic industry – each country, institution, and stakeholder work within distinct frameworks, requiring tailored solutions rather than uniform approaches. At Microsoft, we categorize the sector into verticals providers, payers, pharmaceuticals, public health, health regulatory & policy maker, social services, life sciences, and medical technology (MedTech) each with unique priorities and digital maturity levels.

Providers, such as hospitals and clinics, focus on enhancing patient engagement, streamlining physician workflows, and perfecting operations. Their digital transformation revolves around

seamless data integration, real-time access to patient records, and AI-driven analytics to improve clinical outcomes managing health data at scale, improving patient experiences, coordinating the care, and driving operational efficiency while supporting security, compliance, and interoperability. Meanwhile, Payers, including public and private insurers, prioritize beneficiary management, cost containment, and personalized health services aiming to transform payer operations with AI, migrate core claims platforms to Azure, and leverage data to improve member experiences. In Saudi Arabia, for example, government-subsidized healthcare for nationals operates alongside private insurance models for expatriates, requiring digital infrastructure that ensures efficiency, compliance, and interoperability. Microsoft's Cloud for Healthcare provides trusted, integrated capabilities to support these needs, ensuring that payers can deliver high-quality, personalized care efficiently and effectively.

Pharmaceutical companies operate at various levels within the healthcare ecosystem. Manufacturers, such as AstraZeneca and Roche, focus on drug development, requiring robust digital platforms for research, production, and regulatory alignment. Microsoft's strategy emphasizes the use of AI and cloud technologies to support these processes, enabling pharmaceutical companies to leverage data for better operational and clinical decisions. Distributors / Pharmacies manage logistics, ensuring medicines reach healthcare facilities efficiently through AI-driven supply chain solutions. In Saudi Arabia, the pharmaceutical sector has been restructured to distinguish regulatory oversight from service delivery, improving governance, enhancing transparency, and accelerating market access.

Beyond patient care, public health plays a critical role in population-wide health management, from vaccination campaigns to epidemic response. Unlike hospitals, which engage in direct patient care, public health agencies operate at scale, leveraging digital tools for real-time disease surveillance and predictive analytics. This distinction became especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where governments relied on cloud-based platforms and AI modeling for pandemic response, demonstrating that public health is not just a medical concern but a national security priority.

Healthcare intersects with social services, particularly in community-based care programs. Midwifery, elderly care, and social welfare initiatives often fall outside traditional healthcare structures but remain integral to public well-being. Microsoft supports social service providers by integrating digital solutions that streamline resource allocation, improve outreach, and enhance cross-sector collaboration between healthcare and social development agencies.

Life sciences is another rapidly evolving sector, with institutions such as King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Centre (KFSH&RC), King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology "KACST"

and King Abdullah University of Science and Technology “KAUST” leading groundbreaking research in genomics, AI-assisted diagnostics, and biomedical innovation. These organizations require highly secure cloud environments to ensure compliance with international standards such as HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) and FHIR (Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources), enabling advanced data analytics while maintaining confidentiality and regulatory alignment. The Main key areas of focus include transforming clinical trials, streamlining factory operations, increasing visibility into end-to-end supply chain status, and supporting productivity goals through increased automation.

Meanwhile, MedTech is redefining healthcare delivery with innovations in AI-powered diagnostics, remote monitoring, and immersive technologies for surgical training and medical imaging. Partnerships with companies and Microsoft Partners such as GE Healthcare, Teladoc Health, IQVIA, PwC, EY, Sectra, Sophia Genetics and Siemens are driving the integration of advanced technologies into clinical settings, making precision medicine and real-time patient monitoring more accessible. Saudi Arabia is at the forefront of this transformation, adopting a structured, forward-thinking approach. The Ministry of Health has transitioned into a regulatory role, while independent bodies such as the Council of Health Insurance (CHI) oversee insurance frameworks. The shift from a budget-based healthcare model to a value-based system – where providers are reimbursed based on patient outcomes rather than the number of procedures performed – is a significant step in aligning the country’s healthcare system with the best global practices.

Microsoft’s approach to digital transformation is deeply rooted in understanding the intricacies of each healthcare vertical. Rather than applying broad, generic solutions, we develop technology tailored to the specific needs of providers, payers, life sciences innovators, and regulatory bodies. By leveraging AI, cloud computing, and data-driven insights, we help build agile, patient-centric healthcare ecosystems that enhance efficiency, elevate care quality, and support long-term sustainability.

What are the key priorities shaping Saudi Arabia’s digital healthcare transformation?

Saudi Arabia is undergoing a fundamental transformation in healthcare, driven by three core priorities: creating a seamlessly connected healthcare experience, ensuring real-time access to health data, and modernizing regulatory frameworks to support digital innovation. These elements are designed to build a patient-centric, technologically advanced system that enhances efficiency, accessibility, and quality of care.

At the heart of this transformation is the drive to create an integrated and frictionless healthcare journey. Historically, healthcare systems have operated in silos, requiring patients to navigate multiple disconnected platforms for appointments, insurance claims, and treatment coordination. Saudi Arabia is addressing this challenge through unified platform of Ministry of Health like **Sehhaty**, to access health information and obtain several health integrated services provided by various entities in the health sector to all individuals, citizens, and residents in the Kingdom, along with their dependents, including children, the elderly, or people with special needs. These innovations ensure that healthcare services are not only more accessible but also more efficient, enabling patients to book consultations, access medical records, and receive telehealth services in a streamlined manner. The broader goal is to move beyond simple data connectivity and toward a fully integrated patient experience, where individuals transition effortlessly between different healthcare touchpoints, improving both engagement and outcomes.

A second pillar of this transformation is enhancing data accessibility and integration, ensuring that healthcare providers, insurers, and policymakers have real-time access to critical information. To achieve this, Saudi Arabia is established National Health Information Center (NHIC) linked to the Council of Health Services and an e-network for health information managing and organizing the sharing of health information among health sector authorities. Its mission includes developing policies and strategies for health information governance, standardizing health data terms, creating unified electronic health files, adopting international health classifications, and coordinating with telehealth networks. NHIC also focuses on raising awareness, conducting research, and cooperating with national and international health information organizations. For example, insurance eligibility is now linked to visa issuance, allowing patients to receive automatic coverage upon arrival without manual verification processes. Similarly, emergency and specialist referrals are increasingly automated, ensuring that critical cases are transferred seamlessly between facilities based on real-time availability and medical urgency.

Beyond operational improvements, a regulatory overhaul is reshaping the governance of the healthcare ecosystem. Previously, the Ministry of Health was responsible for overseeing all aspects of healthcare, from regulation to service provision. Today, these functions are increasingly distributed across specialized entities, ensuring greater accountability, efficiency, and adaptability. The Council of Health Insurance CHI is established for Governance and regulation of the private health insurance sector by enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of health services for beneficiaries and enabling stakeholders to achieve fairness, transparency, and excellence in performance and excellence. CHI implemented **nphies platform, it** is designed to be a digital gateway that facilitates and controls the exchange of healthcare transactions between

stakeholders in the healthcare sector enhancing efficiency, transparency, and data privacy Implemented by the Council of Health Insurance and in cooperation with the National Center for Health Information and support the Ministry of Health

This separation allows for a more dynamic policy environment, particularly in emerging areas such as genomics, AI-driven diagnostics, and precision medicine, where regulations need to be agile enough to accommodate new technological advancements. Additionally, the introduction of virtual hospitals reflects a strategic shift toward digital-first care models, ensuring that specialized expertise is available across the country without geographical limitations.

Saudi Arabia is also making substantial investments in research, clinical trials, and biopharmaceutical innovation to reduce reliance on imported medical technologies and drive homegrown healthcare advancements. By fostering a robust research ecosystem, the country aims to position itself as a regional leader in biotechnology and precision medicine. New policies are encouraging local startups, helping clinical trials, and integrating advanced medical research into mainstream healthcare, ensuring that treatments are not only innovative but also tailored to the specific needs of the population.

Microsoft plays a critical role in supporting these ambitions by providing AI-driven analytics, secure cloud-based infrastructure, and digital solutions that enhance interoperability across healthcare verticals. By aligning technology with Saudi Arabia’s vision for a highly integrated, data-driven, and sustainable healthcare system, we enable real-time insights, enhance patient outcomes, and empower healthcare providers with the tools needed to deliver world-class care. This strategic digital transformation lays the foundation for a future where healthcare is not just reactive but predictive, ensuring better health outcomes, operational efficiencies, and a truly patient-centered approach.

How is Saudi Arabia leveraging key performance indicators (KPIs) to drive digital healthcare transformation?

Saudi Arabia’s digital healthcare transformation is built on a structured framework of key performance indicators (KPIs) designed to measure progress, benchmark against international standards, and ensure continuous improvement. These KPIs go beyond internal performance tracking; they serve as strategic enablers that align the healthcare system with the best global practices, improve operational efficiency, and enhance patient outcomes. At the forefront of this transformation are three critical priorities: improving emergency response times, reducing patient

wait times, and achieving universal healthcare access.

One of the most pressing KPIs focuses on emergency response times, particularly for ambulance services and outpatient emergency waiting time through a program with +40 indicators. The goal is to reduce response times to the international standard, ensuring faster intervention in critical cases. Achieving this requires more than increased resources – it necessitates a data-driven, AI-enhanced approach that integrates real-time demand tracking, dynamic ambulance distribution, and intelligent traffic management systems to improve dispatch coordination and optimize routing.

Equally crucial is reducing hospital congestion and optimizing patient flow, where KPIs now extend beyond measuring patient volumes to evaluating no-show rates, unnecessary hospital visits, and readmission rates. Data analysis has revealed that the hospital visits could be effectively managed at primary care clinics rather than tertiary hospitals, leading to the introduction of a structured referral-based healthcare model. Under this system, citizens are assigned to dedicated primary care centers as their first point of medical contact, ensuring that only complex cases are escalated to specialized hospitals. This approach not only reduces waiting times but also enhances the efficiency of hospital resource allocation and improves continuity of care.

Beyond service optimization, universal healthcare coverage remains a central KPI, with the Kingdom aiming to ensure its population has seamless access to healthcare services. The government is using digital transformation to achieve this through the integration of electronic medical records, streamlined health insurance enrollment, and an interconnected national healthcare network. Additionally, the introduction of service-level agreements (SLAs) has significantly enhanced efficiency. For instance, international investors entering the country under premium visa programs can now complete all required healthcare and regulatory procedures within days through a single, digitally integrated platform – a testament to how healthcare KPIs are shaping broader economic and investment frameworks.

However, achieving these ambitious KPIs needs more than technology, it demands a fundamental shift in healthcare operations and policy. Saudi Arabia is actively reengineering its policy frameworks, business processes, and clinical workflows to ensure that digitalization enhances, rather than simply overlays, existing healthcare structures. This transformation extends to refining hospital protocols, modernizing regulatory oversight, and fostering a healthcare system that is not only technologically advanced but also highly responsive to patient needs and systemic challenges.

Saudi Arabia’s approach to KPIs is not just about measurement – it is about ensuring that digital transformation translates into tangible, lasting improvements in healthcare delivery, accessibility,

and efficiency. By combining advanced technology with forward-thinking policy reforms, the Kingdom is setting new benchmarks for healthcare excellence and positioning itself as a global leader in digital health innovation.

How is Microsoft supporting talent development and digital capacity-building in Saudi Arabia?

Saudi Arabia’s digital transformation depends not only on technological advancements but also on cultivating a highly skilled workforce capable of sustaining and driving innovation. With AI, cloud computing, and data analytics reshaping industries, Microsoft plays a crucial role in ensuring that local talent is equipped with the ability to implement and manage these technologies effectively. A key pillar of this strategy is structured digital learning and upskilling, delivered through platforms like founders’ hub for startups and Microsoft learn which offers specialized training programs tailored to different sectors, including healthcare, AI, and cloud services. These programs provide professionals with access to industry-specific best practices, technical certifications, and applied learning paths that enable them to integrate emerging technologies into their respective fields.

Beyond open learning resources, Microsoft enforces continuous professional development within its workforce, requiring employees to engage in structured training programs throughout the year. These cover technological advancements, regulatory changes, and industry-specific innovations, ensuring that Microsoft’s teams in Saudi Arabia remain at the forefront of digital transformation while aligning their ability with national priorities.

To further develop the country’s talent pipeline, Microsoft runs many programs and initiatives for new full-time employees from undergraduate, graduate, MBA, PhD, or LEAP backgrounds such as the Microsoft Aspire, Global university, Discovery, Explore, PhD, MBA, JD and Corporate, External, and Legal Affairs internships Programs, Microsoft Academy for College Hires (MACH), which provides recent graduates with hands-on exposure to various technology disciplines before allowing them to specialize based on their strengths and interests. It embarks on a career journey, discovering not just a job, but a calling that aligns with talent’s deepest aspirations and empowers to leave a lasting impact on the world. Similarly, enterprise-scale training programs are designed for organizations, offering structured learning paths for IT professionals, business leaders, researchers, and data scientists, ensuring that digital transformation extends beyond Microsoft’s internal teams and into a broader ecosystem.

Microsoft’s commitment to empowering everyone to achieve more in the new AI era, includes helping advance AI literacy across the Kingdom’s public and private sectors. The company has launched initiatives, in collaboration with local partners, with the aim to empower 100,000 Saudi nationals with vital AI skills by 2025. As a major milestone toward this goal, Microsoft and the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology set up a Center of Excellence to empower professionals across Saudi Arabia with the advanced AI and cloud computing skills needed to thrive in the new digital era, and to enhance their employability.

Microsoft also announced the establishment of the Microsoft AI Academy in collaboration with the SDAIA Academy to build national AI capabilities through various joint programs, including the Microsoft Azure Professional Certificate Program, which will equip national talent with globally recognized professional certifications.

Such initiatives, along with the datacenter region in Saudi Arabia, will play a critical role in accelerating the development of a future-ready workforce, fuel economic growth, and foster innovation in an AI-powered world.

Microsoft’s commitment to Saudi Arabia extends far beyond technological deployment – it is about empowering a skilled workforce, fostering national ability, and ensuring that digital transformation is led and sustained by local talent. By combining structured education programs, enterprise training, AI governance, and large-scale infrastructure investments, Microsoft is playing a key role in shaping Saudi Arabia’s future as a global leader in digital innovation.

How does Microsoft’s collaborative approach shape the future of digital healthcare, and what message would you like to share with industry stakeholders?

The transformation of healthcare relies on strategic collaboration, and at Microsoft, partnership is a fundamental pillar of our approach. No single entity can drive large-scale digital innovation alone; it requires a collective effort between technology providers, healthcare institutions, industry stakeholders, and policymakers to ensure that solutions are scalable, relevant, and seamlessly integrated into real-world settings.

Our partnerships extend across leading global healthcare organizations as well as key government entities like the Ministry of Health, Saudi Health Holding Company, Medical Cities, universities, regional Clusters specially Madinah and Makkah, KFSH&RC, KFMC, CHI, others. These collaborations serve as a bridge between innovative technology and the healthcare industry’s evolving needs,

ensuring that digital solutions are tailored to specific challenges and designed for long-term impact.

A key enabler of this transformation is Microsoft Cloud for Healthcare, Microsoft Cloud for Healthcare is a comprehensive suite of cloud-based solutions designed to enhance patient care, streamline clinical and operational workflows, and drive innovation in the healthcare industry. Leveraging the power of AI, data analytics, and secure cloud infrastructure, it aims to transform healthcare delivery and improve patient outcomes. Key features include AI-powered solutions that offer actionable insights and automate routine tasks, data integration and analytics tools that unify clinical and operational data and enhance patient care through personalized experiences and virtual health solutions. Additionally, it ensures the protection and governance of health data across clouds, apps, and devices, adhering to industry standards and best practices. The benefits of Microsoft Cloud for Healthcare include improved healthcare experiences, cost savings through optimized resource use, accelerated innovation in healthcare research, and enhanced collaboration among healthcare teams. Overall, Microsoft Cloud for Healthcare is poised to revolutionize the healthcare industry by providing a robust, secure, and intelligent platform that supports the entire healthcare ecosystem, empowering organizations to deliver better care and achieve sustainable growth.

Looking ahead, generative AI is poised to revolutionize healthcare, offering unprecedented opportunities to automate administrative tasks, support clinical decision-making, and enhance overall patient care. Microsoft is taking a measured and responsible approach to AI implementation, ensuring that each use case is ethically designed, rigorously evaluated, and aligned with global healthcare regulations. Rather than deploying AI in high-risk clinical applications at once, we focus first on enhancing operational efficiencies, gradually expanding into more complex medical applications as the technology matures.

As we advance into this next phase of healthcare digitalization, partnerships will remain the driving force behind sustainable innovation. I extend my gratitude to our partners, customers, and industry stakeholders who continue to collaborate with us in shaping the future of healthcare. Microsoft stays committed to empowering healthcare professionals, driving technological excellence, and ensuring that digital transformation leads to tangible, lasting improvements in patient care and system-wide efficiency.

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