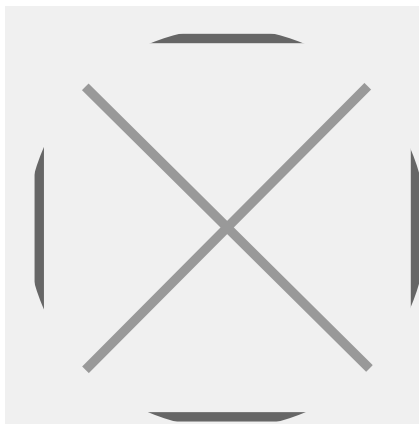


Interview with Abdullah Al Hindawi, CEO, Private Hospitals Association



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The Association was founded in 1984 and has played an important role throughout the decades improving the standards of the country's private hospitals. How important is the Association today in building the success of the Jordanian private hospital industry?

The Private Hospitals Association (PHA) is a private voluntary, non-profit organization that was established in 1984 representing the private hospitals interests in Jordan. The PHA membership comprises Independent private hospitals in Jordan.

One of the main objectives of the association is to upgrade the level of services provided in the private hospitals, as well as increasing the number of members as it will improve the strength and leverage of the association in defending the rights and solve problems the members face.

Training is one of the new services provided in the association. PHA bases its training courses on the needs of the private hospitals so we can further upgrade all aspects of medical and hospitality services offered in member hospitals. Another major topic for PHA is medical tourism. Jordan is the top medical tourism destination in the MENA region and ranked fifth globally according to a 2010 World Bank report. This is of course an impressive performance but it is also a big challenge for the association and its members for further development: we are working very hard and according to a long term strategic plan to save and improve Jordan position in the global health industry through improving our medical and wellness services, improve quality in hospitals, increase number of hospitals with international accreditation in order to attract more local and international patients.

The main goal of the Association is building the capacity of the country's private hospitals to become globally competitive. Which aspects still need to improve to make the hospitals globally competitive?

Five years ago few numbers of private hospital in Jordan gained the JCI accreditation and the PHA started to work extensively and according to a strategic plan on increasing number of private hospitals with the JCI accreditation and now after 5 years there are 10 private hospitals have this accreditation. the Private Hospitals Association is also seeking to develop the level of medical service offered in Jordan through implementing the highest standard measures and the local accreditation programs, and for that the PHA has partnered in the establishment of The Health Care Accreditation Council (HCAC), which considered a real quantum leap in the overall development of medical sector in Jordan.

One of the challenges we are facing now is the modest number of medical beds in the private sector – 4.800 today, while we have an increasing number of international patients coming to Jordan for treatment and for that we are cooperating with the private and public sectors in Jordan to attract more investments especially that Jordan consist an attractive platform for investment in the medical sector strengthened with the attractive business environment that combines intelligent talent, world class medical infrastructure and supportive government policies.

During and after the war in Libya, Jordan received about 55.000 Libyans for medical treatment, and that number consisted 50 percent of the Libyans travelled abroad for treatment. The total medical invoices for Libyan patients and injuries in Jordan represented only 8 percent of the total invoice paid for medical treatment of Libyans abroad. And this clearly shows the cost competitiveness of the Jordanian healthcare system and the desire of Libyan patients to be transferred to Jordan for medical treatment due to the high quality of medical services and hospitality offered in Jordanian private hospitals.

Medical tourism to Jordan comes still overwhelmingly from the MENA region. Would you outline how you are looking to grow markets beyond the MENA region?

Out of the 84 nationalities that we received last year, most came from Arab countries. Number one is Palestine, followed by Iraq, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Libya, Kuwait, and Bahrain. Most patients from non-Arab countries came from America: 2500 in 2011. We want to preserve our traditional Arab markets through providing our member hospitals with creative marketing and communication services such as conferences, exhibitions, social media, and media that are organized according to effective marketing strategy.

PHA also targets countries beyond the Arab region with excellent potentials such as Nigeria, Kazakhstan, and the US. We are focusing on all the former Soviet Union countries such as Ukraine & Russia, but Kazakhstan represents particularly large potential as it is a Muslim country, and Muslims are prone to prefer other Muslim countries when it comes to medical treatment. Besides,

we have about 9000 physicians & doctors that speak Russian due to the education they received in the former Soviet Union and often continued their specialization in the US, Germany and the UK.

What are the specialty areas that the Jordanian private hospitals excel in?

Jordan boasts significant expertise in a variety of medical specialties such as oncology, pediatrics, geriatrics, cardiac surgery, acute care, podiatry, Bariatric Surgery, Orthopedics and Joint Replacement, IVF procedures, Cardiology and Coronary Stenting, Neurosurgery, Endo Urology, cosmetic surgery, psychiatry and drug addiction.

Jordan also offers a plethora of modern health care institutions that have state-of-the-art diagnostic and treatment equipment. Jordan's hospitals invest heavily in modern technology, with the latest MRI, CT-Scan, and IVF equipment as standard equipment in most private hospitals.

How important is medical tourism for the Jordanian economy?

The income from medical tourism increased from USD1 billion in 2009 to USD 1.2 billion in 2011 with 240,000 patients visiting. Not all of them are in-patients; a substantial percentage comes as out – patients to dentists, eye clinics, or direct doctor visits. The average patient stays are 2 days in the hospital but spends more time in the country, which makes medical tourism advantageous for other parts of the Jordanian economy, even more so because the average patient brings 1.8 companions with an average stay of the country of 10 days.

The Jordan Investment Board earmarks the healthcare sector as one of the vital sectors for attracting FDI. Would you outline what makes the Jordanian private hospital sector an interesting investment opportunity to our international readers?

Actually we are looking to attract more investments to expand the number of beds or even start new hospitals. The total number of medical beds in Jordan stands at 12,000, and the private sector share is 4,800. We need to increase the number for both local and international needs and to be able to welcome the growing numbers of patients.

Jordanian medical education is of very high quality and we have many highly qualified doctors. The Gulf countries are looking to attract doctors from Jordan. Many of our doctors go to the Gulf, work there for a couple of years and then return home with good experience. We have a lot of doctors in Jordan's private hospitals that have been also working experience in the USA and Europe.

Why should Jordan be the medical tourism destination of choice?

In the past ten years, Jordan has consistently developed its regional and international appeal as a foremost destination of medical and wellness tourism standing to the leverage on the excellent medical reputation of Jordanian private hospitals, world-class internationally board certified multilingual physicians, competitive cost structure, magnificent natural spas, state of the art resorts.

With all that in addition to safety, accessibility, clean environment and moderate weather there is no doubt that patients from all over the world should consider Jordan as a smart medical destination.

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