

Interview with Abdullah Bashir, CEO, Jordan Hospital



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One of the key missions of the hospital is to set a new standard of healthcare in the Kingdom of Jordan and the region. To which extent is the hospital a benchmark for other Jordanian hospitals to aspire to?

Jordan Hospital is the biggest private hospital in the country. Jordan Hospital is the leading hospital in Jordan and the wider region. Forty percent of our patients come from outside of Jordan.

The concept behind its establishment in 1996 was to gather the top consultants & surgeons in one place. After we succeeded in doing that, we received the highest level ISO of the time in 1998, and we were the first private general hospital to have Joint Commission accreditation.

In 1997 Jordan Hospital started with medical training & education, and we are recognized by the Jordan Medical Council and by the Arab Board of Medical Specialties. Graduates from the Jordan Hospital have spread over the Arab world and outside of it. We have partnership agreements with world famous universities such as George Washington University, Toledo University, and Nebraska University.

How does the vision you had for the Jordan Hospital at its inception compare to the achievements today?

Our vision & mission have been accomplished. Our vision is to be a center of excellence for healthcare delivery and medical education & training. Now we are working on establishing a private medical university. With this concept we strive to turn the hospital into an academic medical center on a par with private medical centers worldwide.

Jordan Hospital received an award in 2011 from the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association. Would you outline what specialty areas you are further developing for medical tourism purposes?

All medical specialties are present in Jordan Hospital, and we consider each specialty as a medical center by itself; neurosurgery, ophthalmology, cardiology, cardiac surgery gastroenterology, etc. In each specialty we are pioneers and we have the staff & equipment to continue our leading role. For medical tourism we concentrate on cardiology, cardiac surgery and joint replacement, IVF, orthopedics & cosmetic surgery.

Jordan is the Middle East and North Africa's top health tourism destination, but regional unrest impacts on revenues. How do you overcome this challenge?

The Arab Spring actually increased the amount of medical tourists for Jordan Hospital. People used to go to Egypt, Tunisia or Lebanon for treatment, but with the political unrest in these countries they lost their competitive positions as medical tourism destinations. Jordan did not experience such turmoil, and the political stability in our country made us one of the few remaining alternative for medical tourism in the Arab world. Jordan received 40.000 Libyan patients over a three month period. No other country in the region would have been capable of offering quality treatment to such an influx of patients.

On top of that we were able to provide the service at low costs. Seventy percent of the Libyan patients were treated in Jordan at a cost of USD150 million. The cost of treatment of the other thirty percent of Libyans, the ones treated abroad in other countries than Jordan, stood at over USD1 billion according to figures of the Libyan government.

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

We are now part of the World Medical Tourism Association, and participate yearly in their world congress. We hosted two congresses for medical tourism in Jordan Hospital in 2010 and in March 2012 by PHA.

Jordan Hospital has affiliation agreements with George Washington University, Nebraska University, and Toledo University; what were the opportunities and advantages of setting up these agreements for Jordan Hospital?

Jordan Hospital was the partner of choice for George Washington University because of our reputation and international activities. Two weeks ago the President and the Vice President as well as several staff members of George Washington University visited Jordan Hospital. Already the cooperation has been fruitful; we are exchanging staff & students and received support from George Washington University when we started our emergency & critical care areas.

Jordan has many private universities, and these receive students from all over the world and the MENA region. Our project to establish a private medical university is one of the issues that can attract foreign investment.

The Jordanian Private Hospitals Association set the target to increase the number of international medical tourists to Jordan from 250.000 last years to 400.000 in 2015. What do you see as the main challenges in reaching this goal?

All parties in Jordan should work together to market the country through a concerted effort. When I am abroad I do not market Jordan Hospital; in the first place I market the country as a whole as a medical tourism destination. We have to work together. We started to form a medical tourism cluster in which all parties concerned are participating: the Private Hospitals Association, investment board JEDCO, Jordan Tourism Board, etc.

These activities are sorting results; while the first time that we participated in the World Congress people were not well aware of the medical capabilities and capacities available in Jordan, but by 2009 Jordan was firmly on the map, among others due to the positive attention it received in PWC and World Bank reports.

One of the reasons for this positive attention is the high quality medical personnel available in Jordan. How does Jordan Hospital attract & retain the best talent available?

Jordan is the medical factory for the MENA region. Medical schools in Jordan deliver very good doctors, and at least 30 percent of students enrolled are coming from other Arab countries in the region. While this group often returns home after graduation, many Jordanian graduates chose to continue their studies in the US and Europe. After graduating abroad, they either return to Jordan or go to other countries in the region, mostly in the Gulf. This makes many medical institutions in the region dependant on Jordan for manpower, and it means that our educational system does not only benefit Jordan, but the whole region.

Then looking at Jordan Hospital, we are a prime location for medical graduates given our high level medical facilities & equipment and our overall reputation. Therefore we are able to attract the best medical personnel, often the ones that studied abroad. Of our consultants 60 percent was trained & worked in the United States; 35 percent have certifications from the United Kingdom, and 5 percent from Germany. The standard of care is the same as you will receive in Western Europe and the US.

I have two sons and one daughter that were all educated in the United States. If it weren't for Jordan Hospital, they would choose to continue their careers in the United States. Another point is security. If we do not have security and safety in Jordan, our talents that studied abroad will chose not to come back. Let us take Libya or Sudan as examples. Both countries have very good

physicians. Many study or work abroad and choose to stay there, as the situation in their respective home countries makes repatriation an unattractive option.

What is your final message about Jordan Hospital as the destination of choice for both MEDICAL tourists & investors?

To both I would like to say just one thing: Jordan is the smart medical destination!

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