Interview with Daniel Bergin, Executive Project Director, SIDRA

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Tags: Sidra

What do you think was the vision behind the idea of Sheikha Moza's desire to establish an ultra modern and all digital academic medical center in Doha back in 2004?

Sidra was created to set new standards in patient care for women and children in Qatar, the Gulf Region and internationally. It started with the establishment of a medical school, which was a branch campus of a top Ivy League medical school from the US: the Weill Cornell Medical College. With the Medical School in place, the second stage is now to develop a world-leading medical and research center.

What have been the main milestones and achievements of Sidra Medical and Research Center since you took the reins in 2006 as Executive Project Director? What skills did you apply at Sidra that you gained from your diverse career in healthcare in Queensland?

My first task was to develop an implementation plan, which was presented to the Executive Board of the Qatar Foundation in 2006. They accepted the plan and agreed with the need to build an Implementation Team composed of people with expertise in providing and managing clinical and non clinical services in large teaching hospitals or academic medical centers. We recruited that team over the following 12 months. The Implementation Team worked closely with another team responsible for the design and construction of the facility to ensure that the design was fit for purpose. We worked with our partners to plan the programs that Sidra would provide and ensure

that these programs and the facilities and infrastructure to support them fulfilled the vision for Sidra. One of the most exciting aspects of Sidra is that we are developing the Center from scratch and so can create the “ideal” model. Although it does present challenges in terms of not being able to seek input from an existing group of experts, the chance to create something truly unique without the interference of an existing legacy is an amazing opportunity.

A major challenge was to achieve the digital hospital vision for Sidra. To do this, we conducted an extensive study of what the best options were for the IT systems that Sidra could and should use. We wanted to implement the best technical solution that would support our specific needs at Sidra and long-term development goals of Qatar itself.

In terms of my input, the skills I brought came from my 20 years in hospital and health service CEO positions. I utilized healthcare management and planning skills and knowledge and tried to apply these in a way that meets the needs of Qatar.

I don’t think there are many healthcare executives who have had the opportunity to work on such a visionary project. The commitment from the Qatari leadership to achieve world-class quality for Sidra has never wavered, from my perspective.

Qatar is very interested in acquiring and implementing best practices in many different areas to achieve the best the world has to offer and that’s part of our mission here.

When we met with Dr Lucio Rispo of QSTP last Thursday, he spoke about the vision of Qataris to become leaders in medical research, academic medical training and healthcare in the Middle East, with heavy investments in most entities falling under Qatar Foundation. Do you think this is achievable and what does it take to get there?

Given Qatar’s capacity and commitment to implementing world-class clinical, education and research programs, as well as national capacity building and individual development, I can see many reasons why this is achievable. The question is not if, but when this will be achieved.

Sidra is playing its part in national capacity building as we now have about 130 Qatari scholarship holders who are undertaking university studies or work experience in top academic institutions and hospitals in Qatar, the US and elsewhere.

We are trying to fast track their development because there is currently not a sufficient locally-based workforce with the required skill set to support the growth occurring in Qatar.

Hamad Medical Corporation together with Sidra shall host the first medical simulation center in Qatar as one of the most innovative in the middle East- can you elaborate on what it will bring to clinicians and educators?

We have been working closely with Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) for the last three years on developing medical simulation services for the country. We have developed a joint strategy and vision for that. They are developing a large facility at HMC, while we are developing a smaller facility for Sidra. Sidra's Board has committed to double the size of the simulation facility during the next phase of Sidra's development.

We regard medical simulation programs as an essential component for the future training of our clinical staff and to help improve safety and quality for our patients. We are working very closely with expert consultants and our partners to guide us through program development, facilities design and recruitment.

Sidra is now in the phase of hiring its new staff and it is important to have qualified and talented people for each position. How do you recruit and retain the best talents for such projects in Qatar? How do you ensure that they will stay and not leave for other hospitals in the region once they are trained at the highest level (because for sure they will be contacted by competition once trained)?

Standards of appointments for clinical positions in Sidra are very high: the physicians need to have US board certification or equivalent and at least half of them will have Weill Cornell faculty appointments.

We have developed a recruitment strategy with agencies as well as institutional partners who are helping us to find the right people.

In that regard, we need to start with a consistent message on what Sidra is about. We also want to make people aware of life in Qatar. It is possibly the most unique country in the world regarding its vision for the future, the investment in education and research, the high quality of services, its safety, along with all the advantages of living in such a vibrant and growing place.

It is important for us to explain that working at Sidra will truly be part of making history because Sidra will set new standards in patient care for women and children in Qatar, the Gulf Region and internationally. The commitment to research and the opportunities it will offer to our employees in terms of professional growth is also a very important component of the mission, along with the relationship with Weill Cornell Medical College. Employees at Sidra will work in a state-of-the-art environment, which will include robotics, computer-aided surgery and diagnostics and 3D+ digital

imaging, with other highly distinguished leaders in their fields, while contributing to the development of the most advanced medical center in the Gulf Region.

We want them to know that there is a very bright, professionally rewarding future for them in Sidra. We will continue to develop relationships with top academic medical centers in order to attract and retain high quality physicians. Our recruitment efforts to date have seen promising results. People are interested, intrigued and want to know more about the unique career opportunities at Sidra.

As a final message to the readers of the Pharmaceutical Executive, where would you like to take the operations of SIDRA in the next 3 to 4 years?

Our primary objective is to successfully open Sidra, which means providing safe, high-quality services to patients from day one. Prior to that, we have to recruit the staff, orient them and take them through a comprehensive development program so that they are able to work as an effective team from the start.

Finally, we must commission the hospital to ensure that all of the equipment and facilities are tested and operational.

After opening we need to ensure that we can handle any situation that may arise during Sidra’s stabilization period. In that regard we will have plans to deal with contingencies.

At Sidra, we have an ambitious vision to provide world-leading patient care and medical research. I think the incoming management team will play a key role in setting realistic goals to measure our progress in that journey to reaching our ultimate vision.

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