

Humaid Al Qutami - Former Director General, Dubai Health Authority



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The Dubai Health Authority, the government body responsible for overseeing Dubai's health system, is working full speed as the 2021 mark laid by the Dubai Health Strategy 2021 approaches. Director General HE Humaid Al Qutami, explains how the organization is working to provide the highest quality of medical care to patients with chronic diseases, promote a culture of early detection and raise awareness about the importance of regular check-ups. In addition, he reveals how DHA is betting on innovation, with smart pharmacies and artificial intelligence, to achieve them.

DHA has been focusing on smart services in the pharmaceutical sector. Can you tell us some of the latest initiatives?

Dubai Health Authority (DHA) is keen on using smart services across the continuum of care to benefit patients, further improve patient outcomes and patient experience, as well as maximizing efficiencies and reducing healthcare costs.

DHA has five smart pharmacies, two in Rashid Hospital, one in Dubai Hospital, one in Latifa Hospital and one in Nadd Al Hamar primary health center.

The smart pharmacies dispense and prescribe medication through a unified barcoding system. They are operated via a robot that can store up to 35,000 medicines, prepare 12 prescriptions in a minute and dispense 8,000 medicines in an hour.

As per 2017 statistics, 36 million items were barcoded and integrated within the SALAMA electronic medical record system, which resulted in zero dispensing errors in 2017 and 2018. These smart pharmacies reduced the waiting time 2.6 minutes in average and increased the time allocated for explaining medication instructions to an average of 5.65 minutes. The smart pharmacies helped reduce the processing time from 22.5 minutes on average in 2016, to 7.9 minutes in 2018; the outpatient satisfaction rate increased from 69 percent in 2016, to 94 percent in 2018. By implementing this initiative, DHA saved 3.48 million in 2 years, and pharmacists' happiness increased from 73.5 per cent in 2016, to 85 percent in 2017. The system is fully integrated with the SALAMA system. We are the first government authority in the region to implement the SMART barcoding system.

In January this year, we also introduced a free home delivery medication service in Dubai for patients that visit DHA hospitals and health facilities.

What are the updates in the health insurance system for Dubai?

The health insurance system in Dubai has come a long way since its inception in 2013. We have a unique and dynamic health insurance system in place, and we aim to keep enhancing it. We have achieved our goal of ensuring essential health coverage for all Dubai visa holders and almost 99 percent of the population now has access to mandatory health insurance.

We want to continue to add benefits for every insured member, add preventive screening programs, and provide an environment that supports the maturity of the health insurance sector.

We introduced screening and treatment for three types of cancer under the Basmah initiative. We also introduced screening and treatment for hepatitis C. To date, 107 enrolled patients have benefited from the cancer screening and 14 have been enrolled in the HCV patient support program, of which seven have completed the treatment successfully. Both these programs aim to benefit lower salary workers, as the programs are available for Essential Benefit Plan (EBP) holders. EBP is available for a fixed index rate for employees who earn 4,000 AED (1,089 USD) monthly or lower in salaries and their dependents; the premium ranges between 550 AED (150 USD) and 700 AED (190 USD) annually.

The maximum coverage per policy is 150,000 AED (40,838 USD). For an additional cost of 18 AED (5 USD) for hepatitis C and 19 AED (5.2 USD) for Basmah, EBP policyholders are provided with additional coverage for three types of cancer: breast, colorectal and cervical, as well as hepatitis C. The Basmah initiative for cancer treatment begins when the policyholder has exhausted this limit. The coverage plan is similar for hepatitis C and includes screening and treatment. This initiative is in line with the World Health Organization's goal to eliminate hepatitis C by 2030.

Additionally, in order to promote early screening and management of diseases, we have also added screening services for diabetes, heart disease, newborn and developmental screening as part of the mandatory health insurance cover. This ensures that we detect diseases early on, which provides a possibility for better treatment outcomes, fewer complications and it reduces the cost of care to the economy.

Our aim is to focus on building an enhanced health insurance system and the provision of specialized services. In parallel, we want to raise awareness about prevention especially at the workplace by encouraging employers to create a work culture that promotes healthy habits, so that together we create a culture of preventive health.

As you said, there is a clear focus on new and emerging technologies. How successful has DHA been in implementing some of these technologies?

The DHA's Future Accelerator's Initiative, its Innovation Center, are two initiatives that strongly focus on cutting-edge international developments in healthcare. We work with international and local firms and carry out proof of concepts with the private sector to evaluate the effectiveness of these technologies, especially in the healthcare system of the Dubai Emirate.

We have achieved success in several areas and the idea is to keep up this progress and closely ascertain how we can positively use technology to benefit the health sector.

We have implemented 3D printing across our dentistry services in DHA. We have used patient-centric 3D printed models for complex surgeries. We have even worked with the private sector for 3D printed prosthetics. We now have a newly opened 3D Printing Lab located at the DHA's Innovation Center that provides medical professionals at DHA with patient-specific anatomical models, allowing them to conduct detailed pre-operative analysis and to improve patient communication.

The lab is an important milestone in the execution of the DHA's 3D Printing Strategy, which focusses on deploying the latest technologies to improve patient outcomes and supporting the healthcare ecosystem of Dubai to excel in difficult medical surgeries.

This initiative is in line with the vision of Dubai's 3D printing strategy to become a global 3D printing technology hub by 2030.

In terms of AI, we have completed a proof of concept project for the implementation of AI to detect diabetic retinopathy. DHA plans to implement this technology across the Dubai Diabetes Center, 13 DHA primary healthcare centres and certain DHA hospitals.

DHA recently launched the Doctor for Every Citizen initiative. What is the objective of that program?

In December 2019, we launched the ambitious *Doctor for Every Citizen* initiative to achieve article five of the 50-Year Charter, in line with the directives of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE, and Ruler of Dubai.

Today, the initiative provides a 24/7 telehealth consultation program for UAE nationals in the family medicine specialty. Patients can call DHA toll free number 800 342 and book an appointment. While it does not include emergency care, it does include initial diagnosis, referral, and doctors can provide an e-prescription for certain conditions; for added convenience, they can even request for lab tests which will be registered online through the electronic patient medical record system for DHA patients.

Through telemedicine, this initiative helps save patient's time, eliminates waiting time and provides patients with enhanced convenience as well as 24/7 access to an initial consultation.

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