Reem Osman – CEO, Saudi German Hospitals UAE



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The Saudi German Hospital Group is one of the leading hospital groups in the Middle East, with hospitals in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Egypt. Dr Reem Osman, CEO for the Group in the UAE, discusses their presence in the country, the Group's ambitious expansion plans and analyses the current saturation of the sector in the UAE.

Dr Reem, can you first introduce yourself to our international audience as well as the footprint of Saudi German Hospitals in UAE and the region?

Saudi German Hospital Group is a leading healthcare brand with the largest footprint in the Middle East and North Africa. The group is headquartered in Saudi Arabia and was brought to life when one of our co-founders was studying in Germany, as an Orthosurgeon. He witnessed firsthand that many patients from the GCC area were going there to receive treatment. One day, one of his German Professor suggested the great idea of bringing high-quality healthcare to the people of the Gulf region.

The founder wanted to have an international name as opposed to a family name, which was normal practice at the time. He had a global vision for the hospital, hence he decided that it is better to use a more internationally recognized name. Until this day, we continue the collaboration with a German Professor with a visiting program to train and share their expertise. In terms of geographical presence, we currently have hospitals located in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Egypt,

United Arab Emirates and we have several future projects for countries such as Morocco, Pakistan, and the Gulf Region. Altogether, we currently have 11 running and operational hospitals. I am the CEO of the Saudi German Hospital Group in the United Arab Emirates, where the Group has three existing (Dubai, Sharjah and Ajman) and 4 under construction. We were the first group to start a country-wide expansion, from Saudi Arabia we expanded to the region and we have the vision to be present globally soon. What also differentiates us from the competition is that we are from the Gulf region, we are a truly regional player with founders from Jeddah, and it is their work and their ideas that brought us to where we are today.

Our hospital group is very unique; we have a full scope of services, not only operating and running the hospitals ourselves but also designing and building them through our own hospital construction company, which started and built the first hospital in Jeddah over 30 years ago. These are one of a kind projects because everything is done in house, from planning and constructing the building itself to choosing all the equipment, furnishing, recruitment of the team, and of course all the operational aspects. This gives us a fantastic experience and knowledge on how to strive to be better and be more efficient. As an example, when we first started, our hospitals were built vertically, which has proven to be difficult to deal with when thinking about expansion, or even movement within the hospital. Hence, we have started improving this and now our hospitals are done in T-shape which has proven to be much more efficient, more convenient and makes them much easier to expand. All above is decided and vision by our founder and chairman Engr.Sobhi Batterjee

The Saudi German Hospital Dubai is also accredited by Joint Commission International (JCI) and CAP which reflects the international quality services that we provide, and it is the first hospital in UAE accredited by the Planetree International Organization for Person-Centered Excellence Certification which represents the highest achievement in patient and family-centred care. We had the highest score worldwide, which makes us really proud.

Following our conversation with several other players in the hospital sector in UAE, many voices raised concern about market saturation, that maybe there is too many hospitals and not enough patients for everybody. What is your strategy to face this challenge?

Dubai is a very open market for investment which has attracted many players. Government leaders and key government officials wanted to ensure the highest quality standards in healthcare for both

visitors and residents, and this is why healthcare investments were encouraged and supported, which in turn led to market saturation in a sense. Indeed, it is a challenging period now, but it is part of the government's vision to have the best of the best here, not only in healthcare but in different industries as well. Having competition is not easy, but it also pushes you to do better, forces you to prove yourself, and, at the end of the day, it benefits the patients. The healthcare providers need to make the business more efficient, improve their quality standards, have better facilities, medical team, policies, audits, governance, guidelines, customer service and better call centres. This is why there is no rest, and the best players will prove themselves.

Another challenge with such a saturated market is that staff turnover is quite high. As soon as the new facility is opened, a fierce competition for staff begins. We focus on many different aspects of their work and development, such as working culture, education, training, and not only on the financial side.

In order to stay competitive, healthcare providers tend to use new technologies and different innovations in order to make patients' experience better. How does Saudi German Healthcare Group UAE implement technologies?

As a healthcare provider, you need to be smart when choosing which technologies to adopt. Of course, there is a lot of disruption happening now and new solutions that are being promoted every day with the use of automation, artificial intelligence, smart technologies, among others. We use them in a practical way and are very selective with them. We are talking about significant costs and changes that follow, sometimes integration takes nearly a year to implement. We are making use of them while also using regular and widespread technology. For example, we are using SMS messages to let patients know about the fact that their results are ready to pick up or to see it online and contact your doctor, or for example for satisfaction surveys. I get a lot of requests from app developers, but none of them is something that could help us. We already have appointments online, the same for results. There should, however, be an app that is interactive with patients, they need to add real value. Personally, I focus most of all on the human factor, teaching our doctors about the ethics of the practice in the hospital and how to treat the patients. We teach them to be ethical in the way they work, from the very beginning, and there is no technology that can replace that. Technology helps and supports but it is the human factor that makes the difference for patients.

One of the topics that gets a lot of mixed responses is medical tourism, and in what niche can the UAE play a role in attracting patients. How important is it for your hospital and how do you foresee the potential of UAE in this context?

Medical tourism is usually five to eight percent of our revenue, it requires highly educated sub-specialty doctors plus logistic patient support. It is not our main focus right now, but we see it growing slowly but continuously.

Dr Reem, as a final question, could you tell our audience what motivates you to work and lead the Saudi German Hospital UAE?

First and foremost, what makes my work special and what motivates me is the people. Starting with the daily interaction with patients, my staff and doctors. This is why I keep refusing to have my office somewhere else than on the ground floor of each branch I manage, easily accessible for everyone that needs me. I like to stay close to my patients and my staff, and it is great to see them happy. We did an international satisfaction survey with the staff and patients to see what should be improved, how happy and satisfied are they. The major response was that they feel connected to the hospital, the fact that they know me and the doctors by name, that our doctors know them, their kids' names; it makes a lot of difference.

Our company's vision and motto are what drives me personally day to day; it is a verse from the Holy Quran: "And if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind," Al-Maidah.

Doctors, Nurses, and Hospital Support Staff lives are very difficult, dealing with critical cases, working long hours, sometimes losing the patients but they continue and go through the complicated cases and continue working towards better patient outcomes. Saving lives is crucial, it is difficult, but it is our mission and goal.

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