Christian Schuhmacher – CEO, King's College Hospital UAE



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One year after King's College Hospital's establishment in the UAE, CEO Christian Schuhmacher discusses the hospital's unique approach of combining the best of British healthcare with UAE's superior services. He discusses why Dubai is an attractive destination for medical tourism, the benefits of patient pathway guidelines and where he hopes to take the hospital in the future.

Can you begin by introducing the main services you offer at King's College Hospital in the UAE?

King's College Hospital in London is nearly a 200-year-old teaching hospital and a pioneer in many areas, including neuro-transplants and state-of-the-art hematology treatments. Trough King's College Hospital in the UAE, we bring British expertise to the region, enabling UAE residents to access the know-how that has been built over 200 years. The hospital is a 100-bed facility in the southern side of Dubai, very close to the Expo 2020 Dubai exhibition. We also run two clinics: Dubai Marina and Dubai Jumeirah.

Our slogan is *"Bring the best of British healthcare to Dubai"*. In order to achieve it, we follow UK patient pathway guidelines from NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence). We apply evidence-based medicine that has proven time and time again to be efficient in the UK. Furthermore, in following the British standard of care, we adhere to the same clinical key

performance indicators just as if we were sitting in London.

What would you say is King’s area of expertise in the region?

In the UAE, patients expect to be provided with all the services. While King’s is a general hospital, it has certain high-end specialties, such as our well-round hepatology department. We can treat a hepatology patient all the way up to the transplant, at which point they are relocated to London for their liver transplant, and then brought back to the UAE for post-treatment care. This allows UAE patients to be treated regionally for 80 percent of their treatment.

Of course, this is beneficial for the patients as they prefer to stay in a familiar environment. It also reduces the cost for payers seeing that is cheaper to support patients in the UAE, as opposed to sending them abroad. Overall, we allow patients to have access to rare specialties and talent from London, while staying at home.

What percentage of doctors do you bring to the UAE from London?

More than 40 percent of our doctors are from the UK, having trained in the UK according to NICE guidelines. Importantly, it does not only apply to our doctors but also our nurses. This helps elevate the level of nursing care in the country.

What is your competitive advantage in the face of well-established hospital groups in the UAE?

Looking at the landscape, there are some very big players, with large market shares, that are doing a fantastic job. Competition is healthy and as long as you clearly define your position, you can succeed in the UAE. Our value proposition is unique, seeing that we are clearly affiliated with our mothership in London and we provide rare services. For instance, we bring doctors from the UK to conduct procedures that are otherwise not available. As newcomers, we had to define our niche, i.e., British evidence-based healthcare and access to London expertise.

We do not aspire to become the next big group and have ten hospitals in the UAE. We are focused on growing our current hospital with another 100 beds and potentially, adding more clinics, provided that the opportunity and geographic fit is right.

What are the opportunities and challenges within the UAE healthcare sector?

The development of the healthcare sector, just like anything in Dubai, is fast. The improvements in quality being processed under the guidance and leadership of Dubai Health authorities are admirable. Where I believe there is still space for growth, is in specialized services to treat rare and complex conditions. This is why one of our focus areas here is critical care, where we have assembled an intensive care unit (ICU) and a high-dependency unit. We have also opened a neo-natal unit.

With regards to patient pathways, King's adds a great value in the hepatology field and fetal medicine. Our services can complement the services of other providers and colleagues in the region.

How are you introducing innovation to the hospital industry in the UAE?

When I talk about bringing British healthcare to Dubai, I am referring to the clinical aspect of its healthcare, and not necessarily its service. Here, we combine the service of the UAE and the clinical expertise of the UK, analogous to "fusion cuisine".

We invest substantially in technology, for instance, we have chosen a well reputed international provider, Cerner, to facilitate administrative work in the hospital. Cerner's footprint is very strong in Saudi Arabia and of course, in their home country, the USA.

On the patient side, we try to facilitate the communication between the patient and the hospital. In harmony with modern technology, patients can WhatsApp, Facebook or Live Chat with us. This avoids the dread of calling. The patients can message us the details of their insurance company beforehand, allowing for a smoother registration process with very limited wait times, if any.

In terms of diagnostics, we purchased the first and only EOS imaging system in the Middle East. It provides image-based solutions for musculoskeletal pathologies, such as children with multiple sclerosis, who only absorb 20 percent of the usual dose of radiation.

Last but not least, we have an entertaining system for in-patients, who cannot only watch TV but also access patient data. Here, patients can see what medication they need to take, who their assigned caregiver is, or which nurse is in charge for the day. Upon hospital discharge, the client has access to a patient portal, in the form of a website or an application which is particularly

important in a region like ours, where residents travel frequently.

What opportunities do you foresee in outpatient care?

The typical set up for a healthcare provider is based on having outpatient care prior to a hospital referral. While King's College Hospital is already close to its patients, we want to be even closer. We believe that the best type of care is one that allows you to stay at home.

In line with this, we have a homecare license to enable our healthcare professionals to take care of patients in their own homes. For instance, we refrain post-treatment wound patients from having to come back to the hospital for a follow-up. By definition, after an operation of that sort the patient does not feel very mobile. We can apply this to many fields like pulmonology and physiotherapy.

As foreigners from around the globe flock to the UAE for medical tourism. Medical tourism sales in the UAE increased 5.5 percent year-over-year to reach 3 billion euros in 2018. How crucial is medical tourism for your business model going forward?

Dubai has been a natural hub for the last few decades and we have all the ingredients to grow more. We have a prosperous healthcare industry and King's is very proud to be among the leading providers. At King's we have the infrastructure, in terms of accessibility with our home carrier Emirates, as well as complementary facilities. In short, medical tourism is important to us.

There are certain target groups who are highly interested in this segment, including other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) residents and African residents. Seeing how difficult it is to obtain a European visa, many patients in neighbouring countries are resorting to Dubai for their medical needs. Here, the government has introduced a Medical Tourism Visa consenting neighbouring patients to access cutting-edge healthcare. We have the ability to treat more or less everything locally, 80 percent or more, and if it is beyond our capabilities, we facilitate access to London.

Could you further explain some of your innovative programs like the New Well Mom and Baby clinic that provides free midwifery care at the Dubai hospital?

With this clinic, we provide moms and moms-to-be with a support system based on community care at no cost. We offer specialist consultations to address all the questions new parents may

have. With this program, we hope to offer assistance in a familiar and friendly environment, decreasing any type of anxiety. After a year, the uptake is substantial and even mums who have not delivered in this hospital, approach us for help.

The program keeps in mind the patients' needs by introducing a new approach, away from what healthcare has done for the last 25 years.

Christian, you have more than 18 years of experience in healthcare management, including hospitals in Switzerland and the UAE. With your experience in mind, what would you claim as the key to achieve a world-class hospital?

First and foremost is to gain and retain the patient's trust. This comes back to delivering evidence-based healthcare. We give patients what they need, while avoiding overtreatment.

Our average cost for colds and coughs is X-fold lower than the average market charge, simply because we follow strict guidelines. It is not necessary to perform an X-ray or a full blood test to a healthy young man showing flu symptoms.

By cutting down the number of tests and applying proven patient pathways, we can help patients, we save money and from a commercial point of view, we gain the trust of patients. Patients inherently know when they need such tests.

What kind of reputation do you want King's College to have?

We strive to be a trusted healthcare provider. We want to emphasize that regardless of where patients are treated, London or Dubai, they will receive the same standard of care. The key component is sticking to patient pathways and treatment guidelines.

We have been in business for one year and we are already doing exceptionally well. There was a clear demand for our services in this market. We complement what is already on offer, while bringing a different approach. We found a niche and gained a firm foothold in the market.

After opening your flagship hospital in Dubai last year, where do you see the hospital in the next three to five years?

To support our growth, we want to expand our hospital to accommodate 200 beds. Furthermore, there will be additional clinics and collaborations in selected areas of Dubai. We will put more emphasis on home healthcare delivery, and hopefully, we will abolish hospital wait times through our highly integrated systems.

What motivates you personally?

The most exciting aspect of working in the UAE is that you have a chance to be entrepreneurial. In the UAE, I can develop new products and services, unlike in a saturated European market where almost all the technology already exits.

In addition, the UAE is a stimulating place due to all the financial support we get from the government and the speed at which regulators act and respond to new standards. This is the perfect environment for King’s College Hospital to thrive in.

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