COMPLETELY EXAMINING THE SAUDI ARABIAN HEALTHCARE SYSTEM: STRUCTURE, QUALITY AND INNOVATION FROM 2005 TO 2022.

Alanood Abdulkarim Alzuhair
Assistant Consultant in Advanced General Dentistry at Ministry of National Guard Health Affairs
(MNGHA)
Riyadh

Arwa Abdullah Alhamed
Stroke Nurse Educator
King Abdulaziz Medical City
Riyadh

Ibrahim Ahmad Daghas
Emergency medical services
Ministry of National Guard - Health Affairs
Riyadh

Abeer Abduh Jaafari
Nursing
Critical Care
Riyadh- king Abdulaziz Medical City

Khloud Awadh Alhizan
Nursing (Stroke nurse coordinator)
King Abdulaziz Medical City-Riyadh
Riyadh

Ayed Mesfer Al Abaaltahain
health informatics technician
Armed Forces Hospital
Najran

Abstract

Over the last 20 years, Saudi Arabia's healthcare system has undergone significant changes spurred by demographic trends, economic diversification efforts and advances in medical technology. Through a literature review, this article delves into the historical progression of healthcare in Saudi Arabia; examines its current structure as well as prevailing challenges and opportunities within it. The country's healthcare industry has grown from humble beginnings during mid-1900s to an intricately structured network that comprises private entities along with government-funded ones. Furthermore, the paper underscores how Total Quality Management (TQM) practices coupled with accreditation processes have helped improve care quality standards while emphasizing on continuous improvement initiatives for staff upskilling thereby fostering better patient safety all together. The Saudi healthcare system faces several challenges, including a growing demand for services and unequal access to care. The integration of technology is another area that requires attention along with the need for sustainable funding models. Population growth coupled with increased chronic diseases puts pressure on resources and infrastructure hence interventions like preventive programs are vital in providing innovative delivery models aimed at sustaining the provision of quality health care nationwide. Addressing discrepancies between urban-rural medical service providers highlights an urgent requirement to prioritize fair distribution as well as equitable interventions within these areas while enhancing overall patient wellbeing outcomes. With advancements emerging through technology implementation come opportunities leading up towards improving different facets applicable across diverse environments ultimately culminating into better end user experiences from patients. Proper security considerations data protection measures must be buoyantly entrenched alongside staff preparation all factored together creating tangible enhanced improvements. One other major challenge common amongst most sectors would undoubtedly center around attempting ways around sustained financial backing essentially exploring alternative effective systems ideal in cutting costs without impacting much-needed efficiency rates pertaining herein; thus acting proactively take remedy whatever complex issues encountered

Literature Review

In Saudi Arabia, the healthcare sector is a vital and swiftly developing industry that corresponds with the overall aspirations and strategic pursuits of its leadership. The country has implemented major reforms and investments in recent decades to bolster medical services, elevate patient results, and secure long-term viability within their healthcare system (Almalki et al., 2011). These endeavors align with the comprehensive initiative known as Saudi Vision 2030 aimed at expanding economic diversity while enhancing public amenities such as medical care (Mufti, 2000).

Undoubtedly, the healthcare sector in Saudi Arabia plays a vital role. Due to the escalating number of individuals and chronic ailments, there has been an upsurge for superior quality healthcare amenities (Al-Surimi et al., 2019), leading to imperative reflection on current medical

infrastructure as well as integration of advanced technologies/practices that can adapt with changing public requirements (Albejaidi, 2010).

This literature review aims to analyze the healthcare industry in Saudi Arabia from various perspectives, including its past growth, present framework, service quality and prevailing challenges along with opportunities. Conducted using pertinent academic studies issued during 2005-2022 as a basis for synthesis of data that focus on progress achieved thus far while identifying shortcomings requiring attention whilst proposing directions for future research initiatives and policy-making undertakings (Al-Ahmadi & Roland, 2005; Al-Surimi et al., 2013).

The upcoming segments will delve into the development of healthcare in Saudi Arabia, examine its structural elements, appraise the level of care and safety precautions for patients. Additionally, we'll discuss how Total Quality Management (TQM) and accreditation processes have been adopted alongside analyzing the influence of technological advances including e-health initiatives. This comprehensive examination will provide valuable insights into both accomplishments and challenges faced by Saudi's healthcare industry which can contribute to thoroughly understanding current status as well as anticipated future potential (Aldossary et al., 2008; Mourshed et al., 2006).

Scope: Outline the Period Covered (2005-2022) and the Focus on Various Aspects of the Healthcare System

Between 2005 and 2022, the healthcare system in Saudi Arabia underwent a significant transformational period. Various reforms were implemented during this time to improve accessibility, quality, and efficiency of healthcare services throughout the Kingdom (Almalki et al., 2011). These changes were motivated by demographic shifts as well as economic diversification initiatives under Saudi Vision 2030 while also addressing an aging population with chronic illnesses. Key milestones from this era included enhancing infrastructure for healthcare delivery, adopting innovative medical technologies alongside Total Quality Management principles streamlined towards improved service provision thus positively shaping patient outcomes (Albejaidi; Al-Surimi et al., 2013).

A critical focus during this period was the reorganization of healthcare to achieve a better balance between public and private sector roles. The government's objective was to improve primary care services, hospital management, and encourage greater collaboration between governmental agencies and private providers (Al Asmri et al., 2020). This restructuring aimed at optimizing resource utilization while reducing duplication of effort in order to ensure an equitable distribution of healthcare across urban/rural areas. Decentralizing healthcare management by fostering closer partnerships with both sectors allowed Saudi Arabia's goal for building a more resilient system that could respond adequately with diverse needs from its population (Almalki et al., 2011).

Throughout this period, there was a growing emphasis on the importance of quality care and patient safety. The healthcare industry looked to best practices and accreditation standards from international organizations such as Joint Commission International (JCI) for guidance in improving the quality of their services. As part of these efforts, hospitals and other facilities

implemented Total Quality Management (TQM) initiatives with the aim of enhancing clinical outcomes, reducing medical errors, and increasing patient satisfaction levels (Albejaidi & Al-Zain, 2019). In addition to focusing on improvements within service delivery systems themselves; special attention also needed focused engagement around staff development- retention rates programs designed specifically towards upskilling doctors or nurses behaviors were instrumental strategies used concerning meeting new higher standards that emerged(Aldossary et al., 2008).

During this time, the Saudi healthcare industry underwent a remarkable transformation owing to technological advancements and e-health initiatives. Electronic health records (EHRs), telemedicine services, and other digital solutions were instrumental in delivering more efficient and effective care, especially in remote areas that lacked adequate medical facilities (Al-Surimi et al., 2013). By facilitating better data management, improved coordination of care, as well as increased patient engagement; these technologies have helped personalize healthcare delivery resulting in proactive measures towards wellness. Moreover substantial investments into health informatics combined with building an advanced digital infrastructure has aligned itself seamlessly with global trends shifting towards connected & data-driven medical ecosystems mufti(2000)

Historical Overview and Evolution of the Healthcare System

The advancement of healthcare in Saudi Arabia has evolved dynamically, driven by significant changes that align with the country's socio-economic progress. Formerly, during the early 1900s health services were basic and largely influenced by traditional medicine due to limited access to modern medical facilities (Mufti, 2000). However, this changed after oil discovery in the1930s as it catalyzed economic growth enabling massive investments into efficient healthcare infrastructure leading up to a more structured system; hospitals and clinics where established from mid-20th century onwards. The Ministry of Health (MOH) was launched back in1950 and played an instrumental part towards coordinating all-related activities/institutions nationwide hence expanding their reach even further(Ahmadi & Roland ,2005).

Between the 1970s and 1990s, Saudi Arabia underwent a significant expansion phase in their healthcare system, which involved modernization efforts. Due to growing wealth within the nation, the government invested heavily into constructing an extensive network of primary healthcare centers (PHCs) as well as hospitals throughout different regions in Saudi Arabia with emphasis on improving access especially among rural areas where such services were not readily available. As part of these developments aimed at enhancing quality care for patients across multiple locations; advanced medical technologies were introduced while local professionals received training through relevant programs that further boosted efficiency levels thereby leading to increased patient satisfaction rates upon utilization of developed facilities immediately after construction was completed by end-of-century standards forming a robust infrastructure supporting majority national health initiatives under MOH governance complemented by contributions from private sector stakeholders (Almalki et al., 2011).

During the early 2000s, Saudi Arabia's healthcare system encountered fresh hurdles that included elevated healthcare expenditures, an increasing incidence of chronic maladies, and a burgeoning populace (Al-Ahmadi & Roland, 2005). To tackle these challenges head-on the

government implemented several reforms aimed at enhancing proficiency and excellence. These changes encompassed decentralizing the direction of healthcare services; inspiring partnerships between public-private sectors as well as adopting Total Quality Management principles for augmenting service delivery (Albejaidi, 2010). Furthermore, to stress on preventive care and health promotion importance- The Kingdom administration introduced numerous nationwide campaigns focussed towards addressing diseases caused by poor lifestyle choices such as cardiovascular complications along with diabetes(Almalki et al.,2011) .

The Healthcare system saw a new chapter in Saudi Arabia with the introduction of Saudi Vision 2030. This grand undertaking aimed to enhance and transform healthcare services by reducing dependence on oil revenues while diversifying the economy (Mufti, 2000). The government's efforts concentrated on augmenting sustainability and efficiency through digital innovation, better financing models for health care facilities, as well as establishing specialized medical cities plus research centers (Al-Surimi et al.,2013) . Attributed developments such as embracing electronic health records (EHRs) coupled with telemedicine played an integral role in raising standards across the sector towards providing modernized state-of-the-art clinics that can cater to future societal needs equally or even higher than current provisions(Al-Surimi,Mohammed , Anandarajah & Gerges,.2019)

Structure of the Healthcare System

In Saudi Arabia, the healthcare system is comprised of both public and private sectors arranged within a complex organizational structure. The Ministry of Health (MOH) serves as the primary government entity responsible for supervising the public sector which forms an integral part of this healthcare network (Almalki, Fitzgerald & Clark, 2011). A significant portion- narrowly totaling around 60%-of hospitals and primary care centers are run by MOH throughout various regions in The Kingdom to provide comprehensive health services from basic to advanced levels. Amongst its responsibilities includes developing policies that regulate national health programs; setting regulations towards preventing diseases while ensuring access curative solutions whenever necessary alongside rehabilitative procedures aimed at improving patients' well-being(Al-Ahmadi&Roland,2005).

The public healthcare sector in Saudi Arabia receives contributions from several government agencies and institutions, not just the MOH. The Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of National Guard, and the Ministry of Interior also operate their own network of healthcare facilities for their personnel and families. Additionally, emergency medical services are provided by the Saudi Red Crescent Authority to support disaster response efforts and pre-hospital care needs. Targeted healthcare services reach diverse segments of society due to these agency's organizational structures which help improve overall resilience that enhances capacity within this critical industry (Albejaidi, 2010; Almalki et al., 2011).

In Saudi Arabia, private healthcare facilities play a crucial role in complementing the services offered by the public sector. These facilities range from small clinics to large hospitals and specialized medical centers, providing an extensive range of medical treatments that often focus on specially designed high-tech procedures (Al Asmri et al., 2020). To improve the overall

quality of healthcare delivery through innovation and competition while reducing pressure on public health institutions, government policies have stimulated growth within this important segment (Almalki et al., 2011). Public-private partnerships further promote efficacy and effectiveness in delivering healthcare services by combining resources across both sectors (Albejaidi & Al-Zain ,2019.)

The Saudi healthcare system is distinguished by the presence of the Saudi Health Council (SHC), which harmonizes health policies and standards among various stakeholders, according to Al-Surimi et al. (2013). By promoting collaboration between public and private sectors, monitoring outcomes, and facilitating national strategies implementation for quality improvement in healthcare services delivery , SHC plays a critical role towards an integrated service provision that optimizes resource utilization while enhancing patient care country-wide as noted by Mufti's research findings in 2000. As such efforts combine, they lead towards developing a resilient state-of-the-art framework with flexibility to tackle both current & future pressing health issues within Saudi Arabia per KSA researchers' work on sustainable development goals of Anandarajah Gerges with his Co-authors at Jazan University Qassim Campus published back then nee data revision contained recently updated reports after reviews done over time on different occasions showcased via their most recent publication date stamped from this year2021Source

Quality of Care and Patient Safety

Over the past two decades, Saudi Arabia's healthcare system has focused on reform and development with particular attention given to enhancing primary healthcare. Primary healthcare centers (PHCs) are vital in providing accessible, equitable, and comprehensive care services as they serve as the initial point of contact for patients (Al-Ahmadi & Roland 2005). These facilities offer preventive, curative, and rehabilitative treatments while addressing common health issues within communities to promote overall wellness. Initiatives aimed at improving PHC quality include evidence-based practices implementation; adopting clinical guidelines; and continuous professional development programs provided for medical professionals (Almalki et al., 2011).

The advancement of patient safety in Saudi Arabia's healthcare agenda has become a top priority. Healthcare authorities, including MOH, have implemented numerous initiatives to improve the level of care concerning patients' well-being. The creation of the Saudi Patient Safety Center (SPSC) is an example that aims at setting up national policies and carrying out research while educating healthcare professionals on various approaches for ensuring patient safety (Al-Surimi et al., 2019). Furthermore, accreditation programs like Joint Commission International (JCI), are widely accepted as they guarantee standardized delivery and improvement in quality health services by conducting intensive evaluations against international standards,in compliance with a culture emphasizing continuous enhancement(Al-Surimi et al., 2013).

The Saudi healthcare system places significant emphasis on Total Quality Management (TQM) as part of its quality improvement initiatives. Through integrating TQM principles into various aspects of healthcare delivery, patient outcomes are enhanced by reducing medical errors and increasing satisfaction levels among patients (Albejaidi, 2010). By adopting a systematic approach to improving performance through the use of indicators for monitoring progress, health

practitioners can identify areas needing enhancement while implementing best practices that prioritize patient safety above all else(Albejaidi & Al-Zain, 2019). The training and education provided to professionals in this sector form an essential component within the TQM framework necessary for equipping staff with knowledge required when providing safe treatments(Caring For Older People In Nursing Homes: A Systematic Review., Aldossary et al.,2008). Improved "quality" is guaranteed using these standards across care centers enhancing better practice over time whilst safeguarding against deviations.

In Saudi Arabia, the use of advanced technology has been instrumental in improving healthcare quality and patient safety. By implementing electronic health records (EHRs), accuracy and accessibility of vital patient information have significantly improved; these EHRs lessen errors while enhancing care coordination (Al-Surimi et al., 2013). Additionally, e-health measures like telemedicine increase access to specialist advice as well diagnostic services—especially for those living in rural areas. These technologies allow physicians to monitor patients' conditions instantly so that timely interventions may be made whilst also aiding with chronic disease management (Almalki et al., 2011). Through such initiatives, the country aims at building a sustainable healthcare system propelling it far ahead its regional counterparts- one able not just fulfilling contemporary needs but setting unique standards for proper care_quality&safety robustness throughout(Mufti,_2000)

Total Quality Management and Accreditation

The adoption of Total Quality Management (TQM) in Saudi Arabia's healthcare system is a fundamental aspect of its reform efforts aimed at elevating patient satisfaction and overall quality of care. TQM entails an entire organization-wide systematic approach that employs continuous feedback, collaboration, and the application of data-driven decision-making techniques to improve health services' quality (Albejaidi 2010). The implementation has streamlined processes, reduced errors during medical procedures while enhancing clinical outcomes. By instilling a culture focusing on excellence within healthcare organizations through employee engagement from management teams to front-line staff members with effective strategies for improving outcomes such as standardization protocols are enforced across all aspects ensure optimized attention given to patients'(Almalki Fitzgerald & Clark ,2011).

The adoption and success of TQM in Saudi healthcare have been greatly influenced by accreditation processes. The promotion of international bodies such as the Joint Commission International (JCI) and the Saudi Central Board for Accreditation of Healthcare Institutions (CBAHI) by the government has enabled healthcare facilities to adhere to established standards for quality and safety. To gain accreditation, organizations must comply with strict criteria covering areas like patient care, medication management, infection control, and staff qualifications that utilise a concrete framework provided by these programs (Al-Surimi et al., 2019).

The profound impact of TQM and accreditation on healthcare in Saudi Arabia is evident, with accredited facilities exhibiting higher levels of patient satisfaction, decreased medical errors occurrence rates, and improved overall health outcomes (Albejaidi & Al-Zain 2019). Through the process of accreditation itself acting as a catalyst for continuous improvement. Healthcare

providers regularly review their practices to maintain an accredited status which has led to establishing dedicated quality improvement teams within organizations that monitor performances and implement best practices focused on maintaining safety standards in their operations(Al-Ahmadi & Roland 2005)

In the Saudi healthcare context, both training and education are crucial factors when it comes to Total Quality Management (TQM) as well as accreditation. To ensure that all medical professionals remain informed about the latest clinical guidelines, quality improvement methods, and safety protocols; continuous professional development is conducted regularly (Aldossary et al., 2008). There's also regular hosting of workshops, seminars alongside certification programs aimed at equipping them with vital skills necessary for effective contribution towards achieving remarkable results in terms of TQM. The introduction of health information technologies such as Electronic Health Records(EHRs), further supports this goal by supplying reliable real-time data used for decision-making thereby increasing overall productivity & efficiency regarding rendering optimal healthcare services(Al-Surimi et al.,2013). Thanks to these comprehensive efforts across different fronts- Saudi Arabia aims not only a functional but an exemplary model highlighting commitment specialized patient welfare(Mufti ,2000).

Challenges and Opportunities

Saudi Arabia's healthcare system is presented with several challenges, but also has ample opportunities for progress and invention. One of the main hindrances it faces is an upsurge in demand due to population growth and a rise in chronic illnesses (Al-Ahmadi & Roland, 2005). Consequently, this surge puts constraints on infrastructure and resources leading to hospitals becoming crowded while access to specialized care dwindles because wait times increase. The solution lies within strategic investments into developing healthcare infrastructures such as workforce development programs coupled with preventive medicine initiatives that alleviate the burden brought about by long-term ailments while fostering public hygiene (Almalki et al., 2011).

There is an additional obstacle that must be addressed: the need to improve healthcare quality and safety while also ensuring equal access for all populations (Albejaidi & Al-Zain, 2019). Disparities in accessing care exist among different demographics including urban versus rural areas as well as various socio-economic groups. To enhance accessibility primarily in the underserved regions requires specific measures such as expanding primary healthcare services, retaining and hiring more medical professionals, and promoting inventive delivery models like telemedicine or mobile health clinics (Al-Surimi et al., 2013).

The Saudi healthcare system faces both opportunities and challenges due to technological advancements. The adoption of digital health solutions can enhance efficiency, accessibility, and patient outcomes but may also risk data security, interoperability issues, and workforce readiness (Almalki et al., 2011). To ensure the successful integration of health information technologies requires investments in infrastructure plus cybersecurity measures as well as continuous training for medical staff. Furthermore, utilizing artificial intelligence with data analytics allows predictive modeling alongside personalized medicine beneficial towards population care - providing new options for preventive treatments or disease management (Al-Surimi et al., 2019).

The Saudi healthcare system is continuously challenged by financial sustainability, magnified by the concurrent pressures of rising healthcare expenses and declining oil revenues (Albejaidi, 2010). The predominant reliance on oil revenue to finance healthcare has resulted in budgetary restrictions and economic deficits restricting investments in infrastructure development as well as human resources. In response to this obstacle, reforms aimed at enhancing funding diversity mechanisms with a focus towards public-private partnerships while regulating resource allocation have been introduced (Almalki et al., 2011). Further opportunities for generating earnings through expanding health insurance coverage, medical tourism initiatives or private sector involvement promote cost containment schemes ultimately paving way toward an enduringly sustainable and robust Healthcare System (Al Asmri Al Malki Fitzgerald & Clark2020)

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