

Profile

Abdullah Sulaiman Al Amro: A Great Advocate for Health Care

Abdullah Sulaiman Al Amro, MD, FRCPC, the chief executive officer (CEO) of Saudi Arabia's King Fahad Medical City (KFMC), known by many as the largest and most advanced medical complex in the Middle East, has proven himself locally and throughout the Islamic medical community to be a strong leader.

Dr. Al Amro was born in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, and educated in his home country as well as in Canada. He graduated from King Faisal University in Dammam and, after training in radiation oncology in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), obtained post-graduate training in Ottawa, Canada, and then returned to Saudi Arabia.

Dr. Al Amro has special aptitude for organizational and administrative work. He was a member of the teams that established health outreach programs throughout the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the National e-Health Center, the Prince Faisal Bin Bandar Oncology Center, the King Abdulaziz Oncology Center-Jeddah, King Faisal Specialist Hospital (KFSH) and Research Center business program, the KFSH and Research Center reference laboratory, and the Saudi Cancer Support Society (SCSS) in 2003. In addition, Dr. Al Amro currently chairs the SCSS board.

In 2004, he was appointed CEO of the 1,095-bed KFMC, which at that time was being developed into the premier tertiary care center in the kingdom. Since 2006, I have had the pleasure of both working with him and watching the remarkable progress being made at KFMC. Considering that everything had to be built from scratch – the programs, the equipment, the staff, the rules and regulations – it is indeed remarkable to see how much has been accomplished in a short period of time in this recently commissioned institution.

This medical facility was built at a cost of 2.3 billion Saudi Arabian Riyals (SAR), or \$613.3 million U.S. dollars, and comprises four hospitals: the main hospital, the rehabilitation hospital, the maternity hospital, and the children's hospital. Once fully operational, KFMC is expected to treat more than 50,000



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inpatients and more than 600,000 outpatients annually. In the short span of 6 years since the hospital was opened, there has been remarkable progress in the programs offered at KFMC, which is the tertiary care center for the Ministry of Health (MOH) patients in the kingdom. The MOH provides health care

for approximately 70% of the Saudi population in the kingdom.

The growth of the institution is reflected in the annual budget, which has grown from \$80 million in 2004 to more than \$530 million in 2010.

King Fahad Medical City is staffed with visionary management led by Dr. Al Amro and highly qualified multinational professionals. I have watched Dr. Al Amro address complicated multilayered questions and inquiries from staff at KFMC with confidence and clarity. The queries range from the mundane to topics such as ensuring that adequate supplies are stocked; perceived salary discrepancies; allocation of "protected time" for research; distribution, and decentralization of the budget; housing issues, which are a special challenge in the KSA due to the presence of the multinational and multicultural staff; and the unique social issues that prevail in the KSA. Dr. Al Amro also frequently answers questions from patients and broadcasts the dialogs throughout the KFMC on its elaborate and state-of-art in house television network. Dr. Al Amro follows his patients in the outpatient department and is a regular attendee at tumor board meetings. He is truly a hands-on manager.

In my view, Dr. Al Amro has done a superb job in managing the affairs of the KFMC. He can see the "big picture" and plan accordingly.

A significant number of physicians and consult-

ants from North America practice at KFMC, and in view of the rapidly shrinking global village I asked Dr. Al Amro to help the Journal of the Islamic Medical Association readers better understand health-care delivery in the KSA. His response to the two questions I asked him, are reproduced below:

Question: How do you see the health-care delivery system evolve in the KSA over the next decade or so?

Answer: Health care is going through major changes worldwide. The impact of a changing age distribution as a result of an aging population, great progress in technology, and evolution in both diagnostic and therapeutic approaches led to an increase in health-care costs. Saudi Arabia, in spite of being considered a wealthy country, still suffers from coping with an increased demand on health care. Studies showed potential increase in chronic diseases, which include, but are not limited to, cardiac diseases, cancer, and neurological diseases. The expected growth in cardiac diseases may reach 415% in 2025, stressing the budget of health care. A major challenge is also finding qualified health-care providers. Only 19% of the physicians are Saudi Arabian and fewer than 5% of the nurses are national. The increase in demand forces the country to expand in both establishing new medical schools as well as sending students to study abroad.

Question: How would you like the members of the Islamic Medical Association of North America – several thousand strong – to help in accomplishing your objectives?

Answer: There are great opportunities for the Islamic Medical Association of North America to help both Saudi and other Middle Eastern countries in coping with the challenge of health care. Some of those ways I may suggest include:

1. Export their talent and experience to serve the

communities in the Middle East.

2. Establish a joint-research program.
3. Sponsor students and medical residents to be trained in North America.
4. Become familiar with the difficulties that the Middle East faces with health care.
5. Establish a joint advisory board to solve health-care problems.

While Dr Al Amro has his hands full with the administrative responsibilities as the KFMC CEO, he has also found the time to help advance cancer care in the neighboring country of Yemen and has been a great supporter of the training program at KFMC for nursing trainees from Kashmir.

Dr. Al Amro is blessed with four children, Rayyan, 20; Bayyan, 17; Afnan, 12; and Salman, 10.

In profiling a health-care leader from Saudi Arabia we wish to share with JIMA readers a snapshot of the rapidly advancing health-care delivery system in the KSA, which presents great opportunity for a mutually beneficial and reciprocal relationship between IMANA, its members, and KFMC.

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