Development of Healthcare Human Resources in Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

The Healthcare system is a very important part of a country. Good healthcare workers are the key to a good healthcare system. Saudi Arabia is a country with high income economy. They spent a lot of money on their healthcare. Development of healthcare human resources is an important part of its strategy. In this paper, we discuss about different medical education programs that run in the country to develop healthcare human resources. We also discuss challenges the country is facing in this direction.

Keywords
Healthcare system, Saudi Arabia, Medical, Alternative medicines

1. INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia is the largest Western Asian country by its area. It has land area of 2,150,000 km². It has population of approximate 25 millions. The per capita income is more than 50,000 $. Saudi Arabia is the part of G-20 major economies. Saudi Arabia is the world's second largest oil producer and largest exporter. Saudi Arabia is considered as a high income economy. Saudi Arabia has high Human Development Index (HDI) [1].

Healthcare is an important part of a country. Like any other country Saudi Arabia try it level best to provide best health care to its citizens and expats [1]. It provides excellent healthcare services to its citizens free of cost. Saudi healthcare system is considered as one of the best in the world.

Trained medical staff is the key to an excellent health care system. According to the Saudi Commission for Health Specialties, for each 800 people one doctor is present in Saudi Arabia. On average, one nurse is taking care of 285 people in Saudi Arabia.

Almost 25,000 Saudi doctors are available in the Saudi Arabia health market. In other words, around 20 percent of the total numbers of doctors working in Saudi Arabia are Saudi doctors. Around 25,000 Saudi doctors are available in the Saudi Arabia health market. In other words, around 29.4 percent of the total numbers of nurses working in Saudi Arabia are Saudi nurses. Saudi pharmacists are 18% of the total pharmacists in Saudi Arabia.

As the number of Saudis working in the medical field is only 30% of the total number of medical practitioners, This report suggests that there is a shortage of Saudi medical practitioners. The strategic plan is to improve the availability of medical practitioners. The availability of the Saudi doctors has to be increased so that there will be one doctor for every 500 citizens. There is also a plan for having Saudi Medical technician for every 400 citizens. To achieve this goal many educational institutions are been established in Saudi Arabia.

This paper is organized in following manner. In the Section 2, we discuss about the education programs. Section 3 describes the complementary and alternative medicines in Saudi Arabia. Section 4 has conclusion.

2. MEDICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Saudi Arabia was established as a country in 1932. The best health care became the important goal from the since then. Initially medical personnel were drawn from outside Saudi Arabia. Neighbouring Arab countries and the Indian subcontinent were the main source of the medical personnel for Saudi Arabia. Efforts were also made to establish medical institutions in Saudi Arabia. King Saud University was established as the first medical college in the capital city Riyadh [2]. By 2000 there were 5 medical colleges in Saudi Arabia. Those institutes were not enough to fill the requirement of the Saudi Arabia. Efforts were made to establish medical institutions in Saudi Arabia. King Saud University was established as the first medical college in the capital city Riyadh [2]. By 2000 there were 5 medical colleges in Saudi Arabia. Those institutes were not enough to fullfill the requirement of the Saudi Arabia. To overcome this problem many new government and private institutes were opened. There were 21 medical colleges by 2012 in Saudi Arabia. These colleges come under Ministry of Health (MOH). Out of these 19 medical colleges, 5 are in Riyadh and 3 are in Jeddah [2]. These colleges generally run the six year course followed by one year internship. These medical colleges have the strength of 2500 students. Admission to these courses is highly competitive. Before 2001, the minimum marks in high school for applying to a medical school in Saudi Arabia were 90% marks. In 2001, the Ministry of Higher Education introduced following additional tests [2];

(a) The “achievement test” (Tahsili) based on Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Mathematics, and...
English. The examination is based on multiple choice questions.
(b) The “Aptitude test” (Qudraat) assesses higher cognitive functioning. Reading material and mathematical problems are presented in this test. Generally admission is based in these three criteria. 30% of the weightage is given to High school grades. 40% of the weightage is given to The “achievement test” and The “Aptitude test” gets 30% of the weightage. However, some institutes have added interview as the additional criterion.

To achieve the better quality control in high education, in 2005, a national accreditation agency for higher education was formed. The name of this agency is National Commission for Academic Assessment and Accreditation (NCAAA) [2]. The job of this agency is to maintain the quality of higher education in Saudi Arabia. Accreditation by NCAAA is mandatory for each institute of higher education in Saudi Arabia. In other words quality of medical colleges is maintained by NCAAA accreditation. This accreditation is valid for 7 years after this the institute has to apply for re-accreditation. It means the institute should maintain the quality in order to get the accreditation.

Postgraduate programs, professional classification and registration are accredited by Saudi Commission for Health Specialties. The Saudi Licensing Examination is an examination for national and international graduate doctors [2]. The Saudi Commission for Health Specialties runs this examination. This examination is required for residency medical programs or medical jobs in Saudi Arabia.

Pharmacists are very important part of health management systems. In Saudi Arabia, the formal education of pharmacy started in 1959. A four year pharmacy course was started in King Saud University. The course was modified to 5 years course in 1964. Now, a more professional and clinically-oriented Pharm. D. curriculum has been adopted by many Saudi Arabian Pharmacy colleges [4]. There is a steady increase in the number of Saudi pharmacists. At the same time the curriculum is being constantly to meet the new challenges. A recent survey of King Saud University pharmacy students shows that around 83 percent students have no practical training in pharmaceutical companies [5]. It shows that there is an urgent need of introducing practical training for students so that these students can contribute to Saudi Arabia pharmaceutical companies.

Nurses form the backbone of the health care systems. Saudi Arabia has been trying to produce competent nurses. The first formal training program for nurses was started in 1958. After that there was rapid development of nursing colleges [3]. Now the number of registered Saudi nurses is around 72000 which constitutes of 29.4 percent of total nurses present in Saudi Arabia. There were two major courses for nurses (a) Three years nursing diploma course (b) Bachelor degree in nursing, for several years in Saudi Arabia. To improve the quality of education, it was decided to have only one program; Bachelor degree in nursing. There are over fifteen schools offering Bachelor of Science in Nursing program.

The good curriculum is the key to the success of an educational program. Old medical schools are generally following traditional learning methods (teacher-centred) whereas most of the new medical schools are following hybrid problem-based learning curriculum. Even, old colleges which are following traditional learning methods are planning to adopt new learning methods [2, 11].

In recent years, there have been attempts to create uniform medical curriculum for all Saudi medical colleges. Two important steps in this direction were, adaptation of "learning outcomes in medical education" developed by National Commission for Academic Assessment and Accreditation and the national competency framework-Saudi Meds; [10] was developed by 5 medical colleges of Saudi Arabia.

There are many challenges to medical education in Saudi Arabia. The language of teaching is English. Poor knowledge of English is one of the difficulties Saudi medical students are facing. English medical vocabulary is a big problem for Saudi medical students. It has been proposed that learning medicine should be done in Arabic. However, lack of proper medical literature is one of the problems in this direction. Qualified and competent medical teachers are difficult to get. Hence, many medical colleges are facing shortages of faculty members. Maintaining and assuring good quality of medical studies is another challenge Saudi Arabia is facing [12]. It has been observed that there is little medical research during the period 1996-2013. In ISI -web of science, Saudi Arabia contributed only 233 research papers in medical education [6] whereas in PubMed database Saudi Arabia contributed only 461 research papers [7]. These numbers suggests that there is an urgent need of improvement in the medical education research that will improve the quality of Saudi Medical education.

3.ALTERNATIVE MEDICINES PROGRAM

Alternative medicines are combination of all kind of therapies that do not come under modern medical practice. In Saudi Arabia, Alternative medicines are based on spiritual healing (Quran) and herbal remedies (honey, black seed and myrrh etc.) [9]. Alternative medicines are quite popular in Saudi Arabia. Recent survey in Riyadh showed that around 70% respondents used alternative
medicines in last one year. Initially there was reluctance to use alternative medicines from outside Saudi Arabia. Now National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine has been set up to monitor and promote the use of safe and effective alternative medicines. The most popular therapies are acupuncture; herbal, nutritional, and health food products; and homeopathy. The Ministry of Health has approved guidelines restricting licences to practice acupuncture to those persons who have at least 200 hours of training, are anaesthetists, rheumatologists, or orthopaedists, and who comply with hygienic standards. In Saudi Arabia there is no formal education exists in traditional or complementary/alternative medicine. Recent study of curricula of health colleges shows that around 12% colleges are teaching complementary and alternative medicine courses [8]. Whereas around 17 % colleges are teaching topics related to complementary and alternative medicine in different study subjects. Colleges of pharmacy are more interested in complementary and alternative medicine courses. Around 43 % of these colleges have complementary and alternative medicine courses in their curricula. People interested in these therapies visit abroad for formal training. In Saudi Arabia medical insurance does not cover alternative medicine. Hence, it is mostly an unorganized filed. National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine is making effort to stream line the alternative medicines.

4. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we discuss about the development of human resources of medical filed in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is moving very fast to develop doctors, pharmacists and nurses for Saudi Arabia. However, still there is only 30 % of Saudi work force in medical field. This number suggests the challenge Saudi Arabia is facing in the development of human resources of medical filed.

REFERENCES