

Assessment of Healthcare Facility in Shaqra, Saudi Arabia- A Population Based Survey



Healthcare

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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted to assess perception of adult Saudi citizens on personal healthcare system in Shaqra town by using a questionnaire to assess sample population's view on number and expertise of physicians and nurses, their view on personal health care facilities in Shaqra town and an opinion about the overall health care system in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The results revealed that majority of the respondents were not happy with number of physicians and expertise of nurses while little more than half of them were happy with the expertise of the physicians. The general public recommends improvement in personal health care facilities in Shaqra town and some changes in the overall health care system in the kingdom.

Introduction

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia is considered to have one of the best health care facilities in the world. The Saudi health care system is ranked 26th among 191 of the world health care system by the World Health Organization¹.

The Saudi health system has experienced several changes during the past decades in order to meet the demands of its growing population. The Ministry of Health (MOH) is currently the major provider and financier of health care services in the Kingdom. It provides free health care facilities to all Saudi citizens and expatriates working in the public sector. The MOH tries to provide best health care services and has started to implement its ambitious e-health strategy to improve the health care facilities in the Kingdom².

Although health care has been given high priority by the government, the Saudi health care system faces many challenges such as lack of qualified Saudi nationals in health sector, effective management of chronic diseases and efficient national health information to name a few³.

A study was conducted to measure citizen's satisfaction with health care facility in Shaqra (Riyadh province). The study determines perception of Saudi citizens on health care providers, quality of medical care, access to health services and preferences for reform in the health care system.

Methods

The survey was conducted during November-December 2011 in Shaqra (Riyadh Province). The findings are based on personal interviews with a random sample of 100 male Saudis aged eighteen years and over. Study interviews were conducted in person. The questionnaire had simple and understandable questions. The questionnaire was translated into Arabic for easy understanding of the sample population. The survey included only those individuals who had visited government health facility in the last one year. The questions 2-5 were asked to determine population's perception about the numbers and expertise of the health care providers while questions 6-12 determined satisfaction with the personal health care offered in government facilities. The last 4 questions were asked to know the population's opinion about the overall health care system in the kingdom.

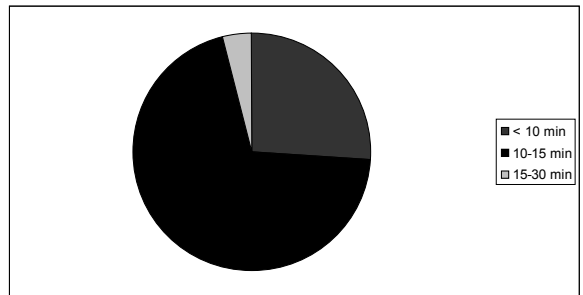
Results and Discussion

Number and expertise of the health care providers:

The survey data revealed that around 70% of those interviewed are unhappy with the number of physicians available in the health care centres and hospitals in Shaqra. The total number of physicians available in the town is 20 and the population of the town is around 20,000, which indicates there are around 10 physicians per 10,000 people. However, we could not obtain any published material on the number of physicians and the total population of the Shaqra town.

According to latest WHO report⁴, the average number of physicians per 10,000 population in Saudi Arabia during last 10 years (2000-2010) was 9.4, which was lowest compared to many other countries. However, according to MOH², the present physician-population ratio in the kingdom is 21.8. The survey also questioned the sample population about the waiting time to meet the physician. Majority of the respondents (70%) said they had to wait between 10-15 minutes to meet the physician while 26% said they waited for less than 10 minutes and only 4% said they waited for more than 15-minutes to see the physician (figure 1). Nevertheless, the caveat of the finding shows that the general population of the town is not happy with the number of physicians.

Figure 1: Waiting time to meet the physician



When the sample population was asked about the expertise of physicians and nurses at the government health facilities, 58% of them said they are happy with their physician's expertise while only 44% of them were happy with the expertise of the nurses. These low percentages of satisfaction recommend that there should be an improvement in recruitment policy for employment of health care personnel.

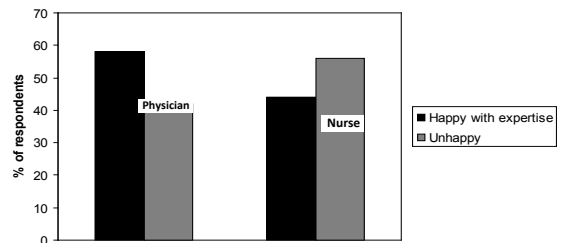


Figure 2: Opinion about expertise of physicians and nurses in Shaqra

The majority of health care personnel in the kingdom are expatriates. The percentage of local physicians in MOH facilities is just 22.6% while those of local nurses are 50%² Employment of expatriate health personnel in such large numbers had to lead

to instability in the health care system because of high turnover. Most of these expatriates work only for short duration compelling the MOH to continuously recruit new health personnel from different countries. Furthermore, some of these expatriates do not speak Arabic leading to language barrier as many locals cannot speak languages other than Arabic.

The government of Saudi Arabia is taking efforts to increase to the number of locals working in health sector by opening a number of medical, nursing and health schools throughout the kingdom⁵. Furthermore, the ministry of higher education offers international scholarship to local students⁶.

Population’s perception about personal health care facility in Shaqra

The survey results showed that 51% of sample population did not get the required health care facility in Shaqra when they needed it most. Many from the sample population said that they had to visit tertiary hospitals in Riyadh city for surgeries and other special consultations. The Riyadh city is around 200 km away from Shaqra. Shaqra town has Shaqra General Hospital, which has 150 beds and it does not provide specialist medical care required in complicated cases.

The waiting time to get admitted to the hospital varied between 10-30 minutes with most of the respondents mentioning around 15 minutes. The sample population expressed their satisfaction with the number of beds available with 72% being satisfied with number of beds available. The number of beds in hospital indicates in-patient facilities

Only 8% of sample population said they or their family had surgery and about 63% of these had to wait for surgical procedures. However, patients do not wait for surgical procedures in Shaqra partly because the surgeries were minor and simple as advanced surgical facilities are not available at Shaqra General Hospital.

Population’s perception about Saudi health care system

According to WHO, Saudi Arabia spent 3.6% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on health in 2008 and this figure is highest in gulf region². The Saudi government provides free health care services to all its citizens and expatriates working in the public sector. The MOH, which is the major provider of health care services runs 244 hospitals and 2037 health centres that constitutes around 60% and 50% of total hospitals and health centres in the country². The total number of beds in MOH beds stands at 33277. Despite this, the results reveal that 90% of the surveyed population thinks their nation spends less money on the health care and facilities can be improved by spending more money.

This result cannot be generalized for whole of the kingdom and we expect this result to be vary to a large extent in different regions of the country. On the contrary, around 90% also believed that spending on health care facilities is sufficient and reorganizing the whole health care system in the country will make it work better. These contradicting results of the survey result recommends restructuring of the MOH funding to improve health care facilities in smaller towns and villages.

When the sample population were given three options to determine their view about functioning of the MOH, 20% of the respondents believed that the health care system works pretty well and few changes will make it work better. However, a majority (64%) were of the opinion that there are few good things in our health care system, but changes are needed to make it better while 16% said that health care system has too many problems and we need to completely rebuild it (Table 1).

Table 1: Sample population’s view on health care system

Options	% of population
The health care system works pretty well and few changes will make it work better	20
There are few good things in our health care system, but fundamental changes are needed to make it better	64
Our health care system has too many problems and we need to completely rebuild it	16

Finally, the sample population were asked whether they are happy with services offered in the government health facility. The result reveals that 69% were satisfied with the health care facility (figure 3). This number is less keeping in view the high WHO rating of Saudi Arabian health care system, which is 26th among 191 nations.

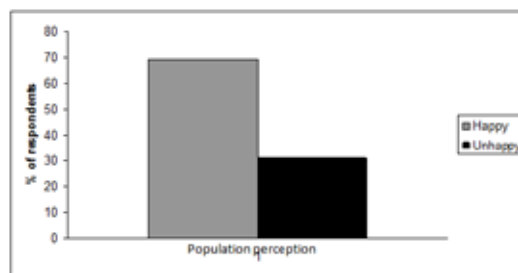


Figure 3: Perception about overall health care system in the kingdom

The present survey is first study carried out so far in the kingdom as well as in the whole gulf region. The findings of the present survey may help in conducting more such surveys in other parts of the kingdom and in other countries in the region. Surveys have been carried out earlier in many European countries and in North America⁷. These type of surveys helps to determine population’s view about the health care providers and the general health care system. The results of such surveys may help the health care organizations in preparing correct strategy and in modifying the present health care system.

It is recommended that MOH along with other ministries work for increasing the number of locals working in health care facilities and the MOH restructures its funding policy to improve health care facilities smaller towns and villages across the kingdom.

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