

Health Vision 2050 Oman: A Committed Step towards Reforms

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The recently concluded Health Vision 2050 conference was an honest introspection exercise initiated by the top level decision makers and policy planners in the health sector in Oman. It was a sincere attempt to face the present health issues in Oman and address changes keeping in view of the long term perspective about four decades from now.

The strong political commitment and top priority accorded to health and education sector by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said was reflected in the initiative taken by the Ministry of Health for such a long term vision in a world presently facing economic upheavals and natural calamities. The main purpose of this meet was to evaluate the health services in the Sultanate, review the achievements of the past years, address the current challenges and obstacles encountered and seek solutions in tackling them, with a view to providing high quality health care to the citizens of the Sultanate of Oman.¹ By providing a platform to understand the priorities and preferences of the different stakeholders, Vision 2050 conference definitely met its objective to review the health system in Sultanate of Oman and set up a national health policy to meet the health needs and expectation of the community in cooperation with other sectors.²

Health related issues cannot be solved by the Health Ministry alone. There is published evidence from Oman that "various departments of the government make policies and decisions that inevitably have an impact on major risk factors and, ultimately, on the health of the nation. However, collaboration and joint planning among government sections are still rudimentary and need to be strengthened. Preventive health programs would have better outcomes if public policies on taxation, trade, food, urban planning, and the like are evidence-based and set with due consideration for public health".³ Another study conducted by the Ministry of Health has found that "road accidents in the Sultanate of Oman have been burdening the ministry's budget with operational costs, which are rising at an alarming rate. Road accident injuries also put an immense burden on hospitals and health systems".⁴ The organizers of Vision 2050 used this event to interact with different sectors. The meeting of the Director General of WHO with HE Minister of Finance will definitely bring to the forefront the long standing demand of increasing the investment in health sector which is at the present comparatively

low vis-a-vis the GDP. A fresh approach to sharing the finance burden in health sector by inviting the Ministry of Endowments to participate and contribute is definitely a strategic development towards real inter-sectoral collaboration. This will also encourage the community to involve and participate in providing alternative mechanisms of delivery through the medium of the Waqf boards.

The topics selected for deliberations and the international faculties who were invited to deal with the same were indeed commendable. The lively and interactive sessions definitely made the participants 'feel' that they are a part of the system as they were given a chance to voice their opinions and suggestions which were taken by the top brass. Though there was an absence of the end users of the system to share their views, many of the participants donned the role of what they expected from the health system in the times to come if they were in the role of a patient. For any system to survive and sustain, a well-integrated bottom to top approach is vital and the bold attempt by the organizers to host such an event is suggestive of the responsible, competent and committed leadership in the Ministry of Health.

The wide range of issues which have a direct and an indirect bearing on the health systems performance were discussed. Different speakers lauded the importance and contribution of Health Systems Research towards the health policy and that of continuous Monitoring and Evaluation of the ongoing programs and researches. These issues were incorporated and will eventually find a place in the final policy document. The experience of certain successful functioning models like those in New Zealand and Singapore could be adapted to strengthen our existing system. Discussions on the health system financing options and health economics perspectives have definitely enlightened all those concerned with healthcare delivery to devise strategies which will help our government to budget for appropriate resources based on scientific evidence. Integrating the existing models like the NHS education Scotland model for provision of quality education within the health system will help to further improve the quality of our professionals. The need of the present times is to make available alternative delivery options for the patient to choose from and the importance of the private health sector and the public private partnership cannot be undermined. This issue rightfully found its place in the agenda. Sessions dedicated to healthcare leadership and management, nursing and allied health professions, quality, pharmaceuticals, medical products/technologies proved valuable for introspection to contribute meaningfully to the policy document under preparation. The wide spectrum of health issues

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was covered by experts addressing the existing challenges facing the health systems in the Eastern Mediterranean Region at one end to the forces of change in healthcare along with innovative approaches to reduce inefficiencies at the other end. The hallmark was the inclusion of the topic "The time has come to get rid of the patient" which implies to shift the focus on making the Omani citizen 'healthy' by getting rid of the 'patient'. Thus the vision and focus of the policy is to get the best value for the money invested in the health sector. Attention was also drawn to the need to reduce the road traffic accidents through aggressive multidisciplinary/sectoral approach as it is presently contributing to an increase in DALYs in Oman and this is a blot on the country which has achieved one of the best systems of health in the world in the forty odd years post the blessed renaissance.

The Vision 2050 could be a boon for the government exchequer. The emphasis which the MoH has been laying on strengthening the Primary Health Care coupled with the increased awareness in the Omani society at large through health promotion and inter-sectoral collaboration in the years to come may have a positive impact in the decreased need to invest in high investment tertiary and quaternary care establishments.

A good beginning has been made and hopefully within a year, with input from different committees/stakeholders and the leading experts in the world who were present for this meet, the policy document will be made public. The policy planners and decision

makers propose to integrate the recommendations in a stepwise fashion through the ensuing five-year plan. This is a wise move to meet the societal expectations through continuous dialogue and simultaneously deliberately mentoring of youth leaders within the health system to take on the mantle for the future.

The conference ending remarks by His Excellency The Minister of Health who appealed to the healthcare providers that the mainstay of the health system should be to focus on being compassionate, to appreciate and understand the needs of our patients' and act accordingly sums up the philosophy of the vision envisaged for 2050. The responsibility of the health sector and its staff is now to make a consistent conscious attempt with the highest degree of awareness to help the Omani citizen become and remain healthy.

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