

Towards universal healthcare

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The Middle East has been in the midst of many challenges in 2015 due to the geopolitical situation in the region coupled with significant slide in oil price. I have been in Dubai now for more than quarter of a century and has witnessed a remarkable phenomenon which baffles common sense. Whenever there are issues around, Dubai thrives! This is because of its preeminent position as an oasis of peace and safety.

In fact, we witnessed some positive developments in the healthcare sector during 2015. The most important was the rolling out of mandatory insurance in Dubai. Even though the universal insurance coverage is incomplete, the positive impact of this is already reflecting in better utilisation of access to healthcare. This is likely to increase in the next year as more and more people are getting compulsorily covered through this scheme. Apart from making healthcare accessible to all, this is likely to have overall salutary effect in the domain including service levels and quality.

Another very important development in healthcare is the increasing focus on digitalisation. Both government and private sectors are moving into implementation of EMR and related technologies for patient records and transcription of medical

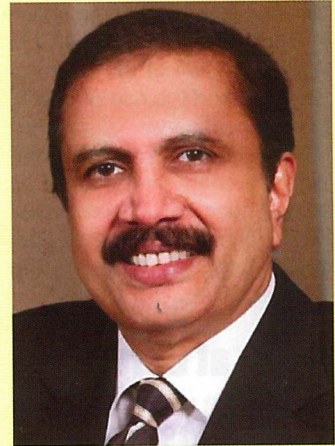
data. Mobile health is bringing healthcare to the doorsteps of people with some providers including us starting pilot platforms for M health delivery.

I find the focus on quality assurance in healthcare going up with the regulatory bodies becoming stricter on implementation of standards. Most of the institutions are getting accredited by well recognised international accrediting bodies like Joint Commission International etc.

One important change in the healthcare sector is the increasing flow of patients for medical problems to Dubai from neighbouring countries. Dubai is gearing up for attracting international patients. There is already a flow of patients for aesthetic procedures.

With the increase in number of hospitals having high end facilities and establishment of premier institutions like the Sheikh Mohamed Bin Rashid University Hospital at DHCC in association with Harvard Medical School, there will be more flow of patients to Dubai which will have a positive impact on the overall healthcare sector.

There are some negative overhang on the sector as the reflection of the drag on the local economy. The lull in construction sector might bring down the number of people coming to the country which can have some impact on the healthcare providers. Healthcare is one sector which is the least and last affected whenever there is a downward pull on economic indicators. ■



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