

Doctors on Call in Sharjah, Ajman Soon

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SHARJAH — Patients in Sharjah and Ajman will soon have doctors providing healthcare support at home 24/7.

Following the lead by the UAE Ministry of Health (MoH) and with local support, an international healthcare company will soon open a medical centre offering primary health services, including home visits by qualified family physicians.

“We are following the MoH lead and bringing the family doctor concept to the UAE,” says Raymond Tromp, chairman of Mediexpresse, a Holland-based healthcare company that has branches worldwide and similar successful primary healthcare models in Holland and Turkey.

All these services will be available by the end of the year when the centre opens fully.

Recently, the MoH announced that it was working on providing ‘each family with one doctor’ at the primary healthcare level.

Health officials said the decision was aimed at reviving the concept of a family doctor in the UAE based on the World Health Organisation’s 2008 report “PHCs Now More Than Ever” that calls for the same.

The Mediexpresse Dutch Primary Healthcare Centre, spread over 2,600 square feet, will be located in Al Ghubaiba area in Sharjah.

Twelve family doctors (male and female) will be on call 24 hours and the centre will also be equipped to handle all basic health services.

It will have six nurses, six clinic rooms including visiting and examination rooms, one ICU room (with four beds), five surgery rooms for emergency trauma treatment and surgery, one cardiac test room, and call centre (for phone triage of patients) and a pharmacy.

Initially the centre will have one vehicle equipped with the basic medical emergency kit and a trained driver to respond to any emergency.

“People can call us 24/7. Our experts will assess their medical condition and provide guidance and home help as required,” explained Tromp.

The call centre experts will follow a questionnaire style and take up to one minute to assess the medical condition of the caller.

“If the caller is elderly or genuinely serious, our doctors will pay a home visit and we will also organise an ambulance if required,” says Tromp.

The centre will be linked to all major hospitals and medical centres that can provide emergency care. “We are not operating as a hospital but we will offer referrals,” said Tromp.

“We will offer affordable health services while keeping in mind the traditions and customs of the Arab region,” he said.

People will be given the choice of choosing between being treated at home or at the centre.

“We will encourage people to pay a visit to the centre since doctors will easily be able to keep the track record of a person’s health.

In case there is a cause for alarm, the patient will be referred to a specialist,” he said.

Earlier this month, Dr Muna Al Kawari, Director of the Central Department of Primary Healthcare at the MoH, had told *Khaleej Times* that the ministry is planning to take the PHC project on a higher level by asking general practitioners to upgrade their educational qualifications to that required for a family doctor by offering them diploma courses. Healthcare provided at the primary level includes out-patient care, prescription drugs, long-term community care, childhood immunisation, children's dental care, mental health, ambulatory specialist care, non-emergency in-patient care and acute and emergency care and referrals if needed.

According to Dr Kawari, the concept of family doctors can help develop a personal rapport.

"At the same time, this system helps doctors screen for chronic diseases at an earlier stage. A family doctor ensures a regular follow up," she said.

Recently, Dubai hosted the GCC-wide meeting on primary healthcare centres which also called for the need to develop healthcare at the primary level.

Dr Tawfiq bin Ahmed Khawja, Director-General of the Executive Office of GCC Ministers of Health, said strategic plans need to be implemented at different stages to successfully adapt to the international standards of primary healthcare on family and society medicine in the GCC region.

The Dubai Health Authority's upcoming health funding system also follows a similar concept whereby all Dubai residents will register with a selected Out-Patient Care Practice (OCPs) that will provide basic healthcare services.

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