

Dubai targets lifestyle diseases

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Lifestyle-related conditions such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer and diabetes are being targeted under a new approach to healthcare in Dubai, says a report.

Other priorities are providing facilities and services to accident and trauma victims and to children with genetic disorders and congenital abnormalities. Adequate capacity is in place to deal with the relatively low incidence of communicable diseases, says the study, called The Healthcare and Life Sciences Sector in Dubai.

The report says socio-economic development in UAE has been characterised by increasing per capita income and access to modern amenities and services - and this has led to changes in the population's nutritional and lifestyle habits.

Dubai Healthcare City (DHCC) and Dubai Biotechnology and Research Park (DuBiotech) have been established as free zones to address the need to upgrade healthcare and the life sciences.

The document was produced by the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry as part of its preparations for the second round of the Dubai Hamburg Business Forum 2008, to be held in the German city on December 18 and 19.

The forum will explore areas where businessmen and investors in Dubai and Hamburg can work together. The report, one of several prepared by the chamber on a range of economic sectors, focuses on the development of the healthcare sector.

The creation of the Dubai Health Authority (DHA) as the body responsible for the sector in Dubai was announced in June 2007. Its targets include full health insurance provision for Emiratis by 2009 and phased coverage for expatriates over several years.

Responsibility for the administration of hospitals, health centres and clinics in Dubai currently lies with the Ministry of Health (MoH), and the Department of Health and Medical Science (DoHMS).

The March 2007 Dubai Healthcare Provision Report lists seven public hospitals, five of which are managed by DoHMS and two by MoH. The former have 1,711 beds and the latter 310.

Of the DoHMS-managed hospitals, one specialises in maternity and pediatrics and one is an emergency hospital, while the rest are general hospitals. One of the MoH-managed hospitals provides psychiatric care while the other is a general hospital.

Dubai's 18 private hospitals have 913 beds. The Neuro-Spinal Hospital, with 36 beds, specialises in neurosurgical treatment and rehabilitation, while a hospital offering maternity care and surgery has 14 beds and another specialising in plastic surgery has four. The others are general hospitals.

The DHA is setting up structures for primary care and hospital funding, the creation of a new central clearing house and recruitment of full-time staff.

The recently announced mandatory health insurance policy, designed to ensure that everyone in Dubai is given access to healthcare facilities, has led to increased demands for health services and products.

A system to have blue-collar workers registered at clinics close to their accommodation is being prepared.

Licences for new clinics are being granted only to those located in areas with insufficient existing medical facilities.

Until recently healthcare in the emirate has been limited to the delivery of health services and medical consumables. The establishment of DHCC in 2002 was the first step towards creating a global hub for specialised healthcare and medical services.

The \$3 billion (Dh11bn) development will be a base for healthcare and medical corporations, institutions and foundations and is due to be completed in 2010.

DuBiotech, which is being built at a cost of \$400 million, is intended to establish a viable local research base. It will have a 300-hectare biotech science park with office and laboratory space, and 30 international companies have agreed to become partners in the venture.

The pharmaceutical industry in the UAE, and particularly Dubai, is a vital sector, says the report.

There are eight pharmaceutical factories in the country with investment totalling \$64.2m. Local manufacturing activity has increased notably over the past few years, with a strong focus on regional and global exports.

Dubai's pharmaceutical market was estimated to be worth Dh1.1bn in 2005.

The report says more should be invested in research and development and establishing more developed institutions to provide quality products. The current manufacturing operation makes unpatented products.

More than 400 pharmacies ensure wide access to medical consumables and equipment. The prices of medicines are regulated by the ministry.

Future prospects of sector

Dubai's healthcare strategy for the year 2015 focuses on developing administrative and legal frameworks based on international best practices to upgrade and improve private and public services.

The DHA is developing the infrastructure required to provide full health insurance coverage for UAE Nationals. Cover will be extended to the expatriate population over a number of years. The provision of basic health services will match international benchmarks. In the near future the number of hospital beds is expected to reach 5,415 by 2010 - nearly double the capacity available in 2007. These will be made possible through the establishment and expansion of nine hospitals in Dubai, providing an additional 1,075 beds, and nine hospitals at DHCC, contributing 1,006 beds.

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