

Private hospitals seek to provide visa screening

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Abu Dhabi: Private hospitals which were asked to close their screening areas for visa applicants, said the move would greatly inconvenience the public.

"It used to take general practitioners in our screening section 15 minutes per customer. Now that we have shut down our services it will be hard for new-comers to know where the closest private hospital to their home is," said Rassel Al Qasimi, Marketing Manager at Al Noor Hospital.

The hospitals were willing to pay up to Dh7 million for a renewable two year tender to continue the visa screening services, before the decision to shift that responsibility to the Disease Prevention and Screening Centres.

The decision to reallocate the responsibility to the publically managed centre also raised questions as to why the shift took place in the first place.

Visa applications

Prior to the decision, private hospitals claim the medical visa application was under control.

"The decision was possibly taken for national security purposes and to create more transparency and control disease prevention among expatriates." said Binay R. Shetty, Executive Director at the New Medical Centre (NMC).

"Especially that the private sector is always willing to assist in efforts related to public health and would have liked to continue the visa screening services," he added.

Even though the designated long-serving screening departments for expatriates in Al Noor Hospital and NMC were shut down, officials claim their business has not been affected.

"We have a lot of walk-in customers to date and the new health insurance schemes ensure that we are constantly busy," said Al Qasimi.

NMC used to receive 100 to 200 visa examination tests per day. "Shutting down that section has not really affected us financially, it's affected us morally more," added Shetty.

Shetty told Gulf News that it is difficult for one body to be responsible for visa screening.

"Authorities speak about sharing and believe in public partnership, had we kept our screening counter open the inconvenience faced by customers these days could have been prevented. I hear they wait up to nine hours to get their tests done," said the director.

Dr Shamsheer V.P., Managing Director of Lifeline Hospital, said his hospital is among those shortlisted with Al Noor and NMC, and were about to offer the service for the first time.

"The first point of contact and a variety of choices should be a decision made by the end user.

"Now that there are only two public centres in the capital, one behind Shaikh Khalifa City and the other in Musaffah, servicing each individual will take some time till they expand some more. We were ready to help and we still are," said Shamsheer.

{Zawya}