

INTRODUCTION

Thanks to Allah and peace be upon the master of all prophets and messengers.

In the last two decades, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia witnessed a distinct development in health services. However, the challenges that face the health system cannot be ignored. Some of the most prominent challenges are the shortage of qualified national health personnel, and probably the competency of the university health education institutions graduates and their suitability to job market. In addition, there is a growing increase in population of both citizens and expatriates that requires a comparable increase in health personnel. Consequently, it is imperative to revise the role of the university health education institutions through the development of its systems to promote the quality and quantity of health personnel required for job market and to satisfy the prerequisites of society health development.

It is fair to say that the outcomes of undergraduate health education have witnessed a continuous development in terms of quantity and quality throughout the development process. The number of graduates of health colleges in various specialties has risen from 1171 in 2001 to 2287 in 2005. Also, the number of registered students in the university health education sector was raised from 10,798 to 16,976 during the same period. From other standpoint, the period from 2000 to 2005 has witnessed opening of 7 colleges of medicine, 2 colleges of dentistry, 8 colleges of pharmacy, 7 colleges of applied medical sciences and 4 colleges of nursing. One of the important developments that took place in the same period was the participation of the private sector in the providing the university health education services¹.

¹ Statistics requested from Health Colleges and the Ministry of Higher Education, 1427 H.

In 2003, the Royal approval for the establishment of the National Authority for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation was issued. This Authority is entrusted with setting rules, criteria and conditions of academic accreditation, in addition to the evaluation of educational programs, with a view to improve them, and the adoption of specialties that meet the job market needs.

On the other hand, the total budgetary allocations for the higher education sector (Ministry of Higher Education, universities and girl colleges) during the 7th Development Plan period 2000-2004 amounted to SR 51,266 million, an exceeding the total allocation proposed in the Plan by 11.3%.²

But despite this improvement in a number of university health education aspects, it is, in its current status, still facing shortcomings such as the expansion in admission and capacity without the proper support, the severe shortage in the number of health education graduates relative to market needs, the shortage in the number of faculty in essential specialties and some clinical specialties especially females, the difficulty of recruitment of quality faculties due to poor salaries and financial incentives, and finally the poor educational and training environments with few number of educational hospitals and clinical training sites.

The current undergraduate health education is facing several threats and challenges. In the front line of these challenges and threats are the exodus of faculty members, the poor coordination and integration between various health sectors in the field of training and health education, the competition between various health sectors in recruiting distinct qualified personnel, and the increased demand on university health education and the society pressure to enroll more number of students. Consequently, all these factors raise the level of pressure on health education capacity and its internal and external efficiency.

One of the most important approaches that help surpassing these obstacles and problems facing the undergraduate health education in the kingdom is the long-term strategic

² 8th Development plan, the Ministry of Economics and Planning, Saudi Arabia.

planning based on studies and scientific methodologies. Therefore, the preparation of this study – commissioned by AAFAQ project – came to devise a plan for the next 25 years for the development of university health education in its various specialties to comply with international criteria, and in the same time to be able to graduate qualified health personnel that needed by the job market in Saudi Arabia.

A number of scientifically qualified competencies were participated in the preparation of the present study. The participant represented a spectrum of health colleges from various Saudi universities headed by King Saud University due to its long-standing expertise. Other parties involved in this study through their expert personnel included the Ministry of Health, a number of military health administrations and the private sector.

The study adopted several methodologies chosen based on their ability to achieve the stated objectives, their ability to lead to reliable results and their practicality. Also, in each track of the study, more than one methodology was used to reach the accurate information and defective conclusions. The study duration was 6 months from 25th of March 2006 till 18th of September 2006.

The study covered all health specialties, namely, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, nursing and applied medical sciences such as radiology, physical and rehabilitation therapy, dental technology, optometry, anesthesia, respiratory therapy, etc.

This study was compiled in 5 major chapters that collectively achieve its objectives. It includes revision, evaluation and prediction of the factors that positively or negatively affect the efficiency of health education in the kingdom.

Chapter 1 includes determining the points of strength and weakness in the current undergraduate health education system. The prediction of available and applicable opportunities for developing, promoting and supporting the capabilities of this system is also studied. The threats were also presented. In addition, this chapter included the analysis

of gap between the current and the expected status, and the suggestion of appropriate solutions to bridge this gap. Also the vision, mission, values and goals of the undergraduate health education were outlined.

Chapter 2 includes the study of undergraduate health education outcomes in terms of numbers and specialties needed for the job market. It deals with the survey of the current health workforce and the needed requirements till the year 2029. This was achieved through considering the expected increase in population of the kingdom and the use of acceptable percentages in health field relative to population for all major health specialties.

Chapter 3 deals with suggesting general frameworks for study plans. In addition, it describes the skills and competencies that the graduate should acquire to efficiently perform job tasks. It also includes an evaluation of the educational environment in health colleges. This chapter also tackles the admission procedures and conditions. It also covers some methods and techniques of contemporary health education such as electronic learning (e-learning), virtual reality, and finally it envisaged the essential contents of any curriculum and the strategies of the effective health education.

Chapter 4 contains the revision of international trends and experiences in health education in each specialty, and choosing suitable ones to be adopted in Saudi Arabia in the light of job market and social and cultural background of the kingdom.

Chapter 5 This chapter was devoted to extracting practical recommendations, and outlining the strategic choices for some critical issues related to health education and the extent of their applicability. The Executive Recommendations were presented at the end of this chapter through suggested program of several stages to safely and confidently achieve objectives in a practical and well-studied way.

In the end, we extend our thanks and gratitude to all those who participated in this study through planning, execution, discussion, revision or scrutinizing for their sincere and

productive efforts, enlightening thoughts and invaluable remarks that have great impact on this study. We hope that this study will envisage a clear perspective for the development of the health education system in the kingdom for the coming 25 years.

We pray to Allah to bless our country.

Study Team