

The Luxury Hospital: A New Niche

With healthcare consumerism on the rise, no detail is too small for today's knowledgeable patient.

BY INGA STEVENS

Is the growth of healthcare consumerism carving the way for healthcare to be the Middle East's next luxury brand? With the construction of the U.A.E.'s first 'luxury hospital'—Advet Bhambani Ventures' Nucleus Hospital in Mirdif—to begin later this year, for the very few, or the very rich, this may well be a reality. Traditionally, luxury healthcare has fallen under the category of 'elective procedures,' but the concept of a five-star tertiary care facility may be introducing a new paradigm to the U.A.E. healthcare space.

The luxury healthcare model is already common in cosmopolitan cities across Europe and North America, particularly when it comes to elective procedures such as maternity services. Many patients from the Middle East have second or summer homes overseas and choose to pay out-of-pocket to give birth at a private hospital nearby. The Portland Hospital for Women and Children in London, a favourite with the wealthy and royalty from across the world for years, offers consultant-led maternity care with additional VIP services such as photography and paintings, 24-hour room service, interpreters, and personal shopping. While the maternity ward at Clinique des Grangettes in Geneva feels like a pampering holiday with a Michelin starred chef offering 24-hour room service to your own private room with private terraces and even a private park for patients to enjoy.

According to Ahmed Faiyaz, MENA Healthcare Transactions Leader at EY, the

concept of "luxury healthcare" is viewed with some degree of scepticism in the U.A.E. market. He believes that the large segments of a particular patient demographic—including high-net individuals, royalty and medical tourists—willing to pay for the extra comfort are already catered to by a number of highly specialised facilities in the market offering additional VIP services.

"For these types of facilities, patient safety and clinical excellence comes before luxury services. They may have a VIP wing that offers additional hospitality for a premium, but they would steer away from being branded as a 'luxury hospital,'" Faiyaz explains.

The main thing to remember, he says, is that insurance companies would not pick up the tab as their entire focus is on sustainable healthcare spending and the idea of luxury goes against the ethos of insurers. "For insurers, there would have to be enough demand to justify the spending," he adds.

For some healthcare providers in the U.A.E., "concierge medicine" is the way forward in the quest for the perfect mix of quality healthcare and luxury. Meraas Healthcare's Valiant Clinic, set to open its doors later this year at City Walk Dubai, will focus on offering personalized care and concierge medical services with international standards of service and leading global knowledge.

Managed by Houston Methodist Global Health Care Services, the clinic's concierge medicine features include access to test results and



Valiant Clinic at City Walk Dubai will feature a concierge service and 24/7 online portal.



complete medical records 24/7 via a dedicated online personal patient portal, same-day turn around for test results, a customized wellness programme, the incorporation of user-friendly medical technology into a person's daily life to monitor and enhance their health every day, and engagement through informative talks of different aspects of their health to increase awareness and education.

According to Hamad Al Matrooshi, Senior VP at Meraas Healthcare & Education, "Valiant Clinic defines and distinguishes itself through the quality of its medical professionals, the innovation of its services and its cutting-edge medical technology. We are targeting senior business executives and individuals that have extremely busy schedules and lifestyles, and that settle for nothing but the best in quality, service and experience."

The clinic also offers VIP services, including a dedicated 24/7 concierge physician, luxury vehicle pick-up and drop-off for clinic services, VIP entrance and lounge access, priority appointments, prescription refill home delivery and VIP dedicated staff.

Indeed, now may be the perfect time to incorporate personalised medicine within a primary healthcare clinic (P.H.C.) "In healthcare, disease management is shifting away from the hospital to clinics and P.H.C.s," says Faiyaz. "There is a more integrated movement of patients across the value chain away from hospitals."

One of the first healthcare facilities in the U.A.E. to offer dedicated VIP facilities is the Mediclinic City Hospital.

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dining room, patient room, and a private kitchen with 24-hour personal service.

As part of Mediclinic International, which now operates five hospitals and 38 clinics with more than 600 inpatient beds in the U.A.E., Mediclinic City Hospital accommodates a number of high income patients on their VIP floor, which features dedicated lift access, limousine parking, in-room dining, and an entertainment system in the standard VIP suites and one exclusive royal suite with a majlis, dining room, patient room, and a private kitchen with 24-hour personal service.

"There's definitely a higher demand for quality healthcare facilities, if not 'luxury' healthcare," says Mediclinic City Hospital Director, Christian Schuhmacher, who says that the G.C.C. culture, high G.D.P., demand for luxury hospitality and



Cleveland Clinic
on Al Maryah Island,
Abu Dhabi



lifestyle services are the main factors for investment in premium healthcare. “People are used to enjoying and spending their disposable income on luxury hospitality, therefore they expect a similar experience when it comes to their healthcare facilities and services. Our facilities are used predominantly by U.A.E. and GCC nationals and any patient can choose to be admitted to a VIP room if they have the available budget.”

According to the CEO of Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi, Dr. Tomislav Mihaljevic, their commitment to patient safety and quality is driven by the guiding philosophy of ‘Patients First’, led by the US-based Cleveland Clinic. While the Abu Dhabi hospital, part of Mubadala’s network of medical providers, has 36 VIP patient rooms across two dedicated floors, Mihaljevic emphasizes that it is dedicated to ensuring that all of its patients are served by North American Board certified—or equivalent—specialist physicians and highly qualified clinical staff so they can expect to receive the same standard of care, no matter what type of room they choose.

From inception, the design of the Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi medical campus was based on the specific needs

and interests of patients and their families in this region. “Recognizing the importance of family and loved ones during recovery, the VIP patient rooms have spacious adjoining guest suites providing private living space and overnight accommodation for the family,” says Mihaljevic. “Additionally, hospitality services exclusive to the VIP patient rooms include a premium in-room dining service, complimentary fine teas and gourmet coffee, and a fruit basket. Sophisticated furnishings and fittings are influenced by local design and color palettes to foster a familiarity and sense of home.”

According to Faiyaz, there are certain critical conditions that need to be met in order for the luxury hospital model to work in the U.A.E., such as reputable clinicians, a respected clinical operator and a good hotel operator. And of course trust is a key motivating factor for patients who are willing to forgo insurance reimbursement to receive the kind of service that they desire. In a world where consumers are playing a far more active role in healthcare decision-making, five-star infrastructure may no longer be enough; the smallest details may now make all the difference. 