

An IFC Reports Interview with

**Dr. Mansour B. AlOrf, Hospital Director,
ALORF Hospital, Kuwait**

On the
15th February 2011

For our special report on Kuwait



IFC REPORTS: Kuwait reportedly has one of the best healthcare systems in the Gulf and currently has 91 primary health centres, 6 major hospitals and many specialised health clinics. As previously mentioned His Highness the Amir wants to reposition Kuwait as a regional leader in commercial and financial services, which is taking shape given the unanimous approval of the Development Plan last year. What role do you believe the private healthcare sector will play in the success of the country's development plan?

DR. MANSOUR B. ALORF: I believe that the private healthcare sector has an important role to play in the development of the country's health system. We have been working with the public sector for some time, and we have now moved to the private sector. The Government can help in terms of guiding us through the healthy system. However, we need the private sector to participate in addition to the set government plans to push the health system forward. For a long time, we have relied on government support for the health system. I believe that now is a good time to use the private sector to support the existing government health system, and develop a new frontier for Kuwaiti healthcare.

IFC REPORTS: Healthcare and Education are considered two of the main pillars of social economic development and are looked at by many investors as key performance indicators.

DR. MANSOUR B. ALORF: There is more to Kuwait than oil. Education and health are two important pillars that would help push the development plan of any country. In general, if a country has a good health and education plan, it will generate and sustain the people that are integral to the development of the country. Without these 2 main platforms, the country will not succeed in its growth ambitions.

IFC REPORTS: How would you measure the private healthcare sector's success in Kuwait?

DR. MANSOUR B. ALORF: I believe that there have been some modest attempts from certain entities to push the private health institutes forward. However, I feel that the government needs to do more to coax the private sector towards this direction. Unless we have a health insurance plan that covers most of the health systems in Kuwait, private hospitals will continue to compete with government hospitals that offer free healthcare services. This sort of set-up will not provide private hospitals a leeway for pushing forward. I believe that Kuwait needs to find a good health plan for Kuwaitis and other people who are in Kuwait, and position the private sectors as partners in this development. With a proper health plan, people have more choices in terms of healthcare. They can opt to either go to a public hospital, or try the services of a private hospital. Without that plan, the private sector will continue to struggle trying to compete with the free public hospitals on its own.

Compared to what is being spent right now, it will not cost the Government much to give people health insurance plans. This will allow the private sector to expand. When that happens, it will reduce the overall government expenditure channelled to healthcare. Perhaps, at a certain point, they can privatise some of these public hospitals to reduce the pressure on the Government, and improve the quality of healthcare services offered to the people.

IFC REPORTS: One of the largest government expenditures goes to sending people abroad for medical treatment even though the facilities could be supported by the private healthcare sector here. What would you say to the government to encourage more local medical referrals?

DR. MANSOUR B. ALORF: I believe that the government and the Ministry of Health are convinced that we achieve the same healthcare system that is provided overseas. One of the things that they are doing is establishing linkages with other international hospitals so that they can get some of these experts to come to Kuwait and help develop the kind of health system that they have. We had some good opportunities to meet with some of the international partners to improve the work and healthcare system that we have in private hospitals.

The Government has started to send patients looking to go overseas for healthcare to local private hospitals. They started with in vitro fertilisation and physiotherapy. I believe that they will push for the same thing in the other departments of local private hospitals in the near future. This will give private hospitals the motivation to improve in terms of their facilities so that they can accommodate these extra patients coming from the government.

I think that sending patients abroad has been more of a political strategy that certain individuals sometimes used for elections. I believe that once we have managed to enhance the existing facilities of our current private healthcare system, we will see this decrease significantly. There is no way for us to continue to do this. I believe that patients being sent abroad for healthcare have been minimal, simply because we have the infrastructure that can cater to most of the patients within Kuwait. The collaborations that we have had with other partners and departments (from either Europe or the US) have been useful for us in terms of bringing these kinds of facilities and surgeries to Kuwait.

IFC REPORTS: Late last year, Kuwait's Minister of Health Dr. Hilal Al-Sayer submitted a proposal for a new National Health Authority. According to Dr. Al-Sayer, this proposal is among the main pillars of the health reform. The main functions of this prospective authority is the management of the administrative public health system, the national health fund system (health insurance), mechanism of regulation of health, international technical and information systems, treatment abroad department, Medical Council, recognition and quality of medical licenses. What are your views on this proposed new authority?

DR. MANSOUR B. ALORF: I know Dr. Hilal Al-Sayer; he was one of my professors at the University. He is a very respectable professor who is liked by both his students and colleagues. I believe that he is a realistic person who is loyal to his country. There is no question that he is looking to push his proposal further.

To be honest, this is the first plan that looks into changing things that the Ministry has been doing for years. I believe that this is a step forward in terms of how the Ministry of Health is dealing with the other sectors (instead of just the Ministry of Public Works and the other hospitals).

Part of the goal of Dr. Hilal Al-Sayer is to get rid of some of the administrative burdens of the Ministry so that they can concentrate on improving the medical facilities in the government, and diverting it to the private sector. Through this proposal, they no longer have to fulfil a dual role of being workers in the health system, as well as the supervisor of the private sector. This will allow them to do their job, get another Board to handle the private sector, and establish a competitive environment. This will give them a reasonable opportunity to look after the health system under the scope of their responsibility and the government. Hopefully, the new Board will help push the private health sector forward.

IFC REPORTS: ALORF Hospital started in 1998 as a clinic. In 2004 it became a medical centre, and in 2007, it became a multi-specialty hospital. It now has a bed capacity of about a hundred and 16 different departments. Kindly give us an overview of the hospital and the reasons why it was established in Kuwait?

DR. MANSOUR B. ALORF: When I graduated from med school during the late 1980s, I was looking to practice my specialisation. I initially held my gynaecology practice in Canada then moved on to fertility and in vitro fertilisation. I practiced in Kuwait and many other places. I thought that it was time to let the people of Kuwait take care of themselves by setting up a private hospital, instead of further encouraging their reliance on government-provided healthcare. This will alleviate some of the pressure on public healthcare and provide us the opportunity to offer timely and quality healthcare.

As you know, because of existing bureaucracies within the public healthcare systems, things come a bit late. No matter how much you want to push things at a quicker pace, you will always have to go through certain people in the administration when dealing with public hospitals. In private hospitals, on the other hand, you are a free bird. You have more room to do the things you want in a shorter period of time. The Ministry of Health has been very supportive to us towards this end. They have made a lot of things easier for us. They have helped us communicate with specialists abroad, allowing us to bring them to Kuwait to assist us in our hospitals from time to time.

Having a private hospital in Kuwait will help provide medical facilities that may not necessarily be available in the country. At the same time, it will allow for knowledge transfer so that we can educate and train our doctors further in certain areas of medicine that we may not have been initially exposed to. That was the idea behind setting up a facility in this area.

Kuwait is a small country; it is where I grew up. ALORF has managed to position itself as one of the good private hospitals in Kuwait. We have tried to expand our healthcare network to provide medical services to people all over the country. It has been a source of joy and pride to have had so many patients coming from various areas in Kuwait, in addition to the patients that we have from the Gulf area (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, etc.). We have been trying to reach people within the country and the region. I am sure that when we manage to smooth things out with Iraq, we can attract more Iraqi patients, as well.

We started with 4 major departments; namely, general medicine, surgery, paediatrics, and obstetrics & gynaecology. After that, we began to have sub-specializations, opening up clinics such as plastic surgery, dental care, and dermatology. We have recently expanded our radiology department where we are including CT scans and MRIs, in addition to ultrasound and general X-rays. We are also conducting additional tests for our patients, and providing a more comprehensive diagnosis in certain situations. We are looking to establish an orthopaedic department. We hope to get this rolling in a couple of months. A month ago, we opened up the physiotherapy department. Together with the prospective orthopaedic department, it will provide healthcare for patients with orthopaedic problems. This is what we have in our hospitals for now.

IFC REPORTS: ALORF hospital prides itself on taking care of people, given this what role does it also play for the wider community?

DR. MANSOUR B. ALORF: Apart from our medicinal practice, we are also looking to reach out to the community. We visit schools and universities and provide our services and hold health

campaigns. We also have initiatives to increase health awareness within the community. Some of the subjects that we have covered include Diabetes, Hypertension, Prevention of Cardiac Diseases, etc. We do this through lectures and campaigns. We also participate in some of the activities of the Ministry and the other private institutions.

We believe that our role does not end in medical care. We also need to provide the proper healthcare information to the people to prevent medical illnesses.

IFC REPORTS: You mentioned preventive medical care. Can you elaborate on this please?

DR. MANSOUR B. ALORF: In Kuwait, we have a very good vaccination program. We have been collaborating with the Preventive Division of the Ministry of Health for these vaccination programs for the people in the hospital, as well as those visiting our institution.

IFC REPORTS: You previously touched upon the importance of knowledge and technology transfer from abroad. Here in ALORF, what is the percentage of Kuwaiti doctors versus practitioners from abroad?

DR. MANSOUR B. ALORF: We are concentrating on local doctors. About 20% to 30% of our doctors are Kuwaitis. We have a mixture of other nationalities from Egypt, India, the Philippines, Bulgaria and Romania. Together, they try to establish better facilities in the hospital. However, we are still pushing to have more Kuwaiti doctors in the hospitals.

IFC REPORTS: On a more personal level, what is it that motivates you to give back to the community?

DR. MANSOUR B. ALORF: These are our people. Unless you reach out to them and speak to them in a way they understand our services, you are not really being effective. It is not enough to tell them that we have a healthcare facility, come and take Panadol or some other needed medication. There is an Arabic term called "hakim", which refers to a person who has the knowledge and experience (a Doctor, if you will). People go to him for advice on whatever they may need in their lives. In Lebanon and Syria, they use this term. It is basically the term for a person with knowledge--someone people go to, to better understand things.

It is not enough to just be the person in the health system. We want to sit with the people and understand what they want. We provide them with pertinent health information and try to help them as best we can. Here, we get the chance to sit with some key figures in the community, in different places and areas of authority. These are mainly people in the private sector (although as well some from the public sector). We have existing collaborations with several facilities in terms of information, training, etc. We listen to what they need, and promote our facility at the same time.

IFC REPORTS: Given our publication date and all the upcoming celebrations, what final message would you like to convey our American readers?

DR. MANSOUR B. ALORF: I am proud to be a Kuwaiti. It is a good country and I feel blessed to be living in it. My family has lived here. The Kuwaiti people are kind people.

Kuwait, in general, is a peace-loving country. We are not really the conquering kind, looking to invade other countries, although, we have been invaded by others. In general, Kuwaitis and its



Highland House 165 The Broadway Wimbledon SW19 1NE
Tel: 44 20 7493 5599
E-mail: ifc@ifcreports.com
www.ifcreports.com

leadership are peaceful people who want the best for our community and the communities around us.

In Kuwait, there are so many opportunities in different sectors (not just oil). We welcome partnerships with people from all over the world. In the field of medicine, we have a great opportunity to work with others in the field of healthcare, translating health information from one place to another.

IFC REPORTS: It's been an absolute pleasure, thank you very much for your time.