



# Bill of health

Dubai Healthcare City Authority's chair, Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein, tells **Ploy Radford** how the emirate is re-shaping its healthcare system

**D**ubai is keen to portray itself to the outside world as more than just a land of flashy skyscrapers, fantastical hotels and gigantic malls. It wants to be seen as a hub for excellent healthcare, among other aims, and it probably has no better ambassador to further that image than Her Royal Highness Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein.

The softly-spoken and elegant wife of Dubai's ruler Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum isn't a glitzy clothes horse who opens a few buildings and that's it (although incidentally, as a former Olympic showjumper, she's pretty proficient with actual horses). This Oxford-educated princess is the chair of the Dubai Healthcare City Authority (DHCA), as well as chair of Dubai's International Humanitarian City, a former member of the International Olympic Committee, oh, and a UN Messenger of Peace to boot. The first time HealthInvestor UK glimpses her is when she's rushing from the Al Jalila Children's Specialty Hospital, where she has been chairing one meeting that has overrun, to the Mohammed Bin Rashid University of Medicine & Health Sciences to chair another one that holds her up for several hours before she is available for interview.

And it's even clearer once in conversation that reshaping the healthcare landscape in Dubai is a deep passion for her and her husband. "The health and wellbeing of our people is foremost; you can look at the economic track record of a country and the different advancements made, but unless these things are underpinned by a strong healthcare system, we have no right to call ourselves advanced."

Take the Al Jalila Children's Specialty Hospital, named after her daughter. Princess Haya and Sheikh Mohammed set up the government-run facility after their daughter fell ill and they realised that there was nowhere within the countries that make up the Gulf Co-operation Council that provided specialist healthcare for children. Al Jalila Hospital was then set up in 2016, in partnership with the Alder Hey Children's Hospital in England, so that specialist paediatric care could be delivered locally for all.

The hospital is just one of many state-of-the-art facilities springing up in Dubai to provide healthcare, though. In 2002, Sheikh Mohammed set up Dubai Healthcare City (DHCC), a free economic zone, dedicated to healthcare. The idea is a 'one-stop shop' for foreign investors and healthcare providers to bring their expertise to Dubai and set up operations here. DHCC provides freehold plots of land, facilities to lease, and assistance with practically every aspect of setting up a healthcare business, such as obtaining employee visas, saving providers the hassle of going from department to department. It's also the only place in Dubai that healthcare providers can set up business on their own without being legally obliged to have a local partner. Geography is also in DHCC's favour. "The geo-strategic location is incredible; we're about eight hours from everywhere in the world," Princess Haya points out.

Phase 1, which is dedicated to healthcare and healthcare education facilities, covers 4.1 million square feet in the Oud Metha area of Dubai. Phase 2, which has not ▶



2002

the year DHCC was founded



165

the number of clinical partners in DHCC



120

the number of specialities covered within DHCC





Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein



4.1 m sq. ft.  
the size of  
phase 1 of DHCC

► yet started roll-out, is focused on wellbeing, with 22 million square feet in Al Jadaf set aside for it. Currently, the phase 1 community is home to over 165 clinical partners, including hospitals, outpatient medical centres and diagnostic laboratories. Foreign occupiers of the space include Mediclinic International, which runs one of the hospitals there, Johnson & Johnson and Moorfields Eye Hospital Dubai.

“This is not a real estate project; it’s about providing excellence in healthcare” says Princess Haya. “Sheikh Mohammed asked us to create a community that felt they could be here and excel; we’ve stuck to his guidelines and are really starting to enjoy the rewards.” Part of the work done to create that community has been a focus on building homes for healthcare staff to live in close proximity to where they work.

This desire to bring so much international talent in is of course motivated by more than just providing excellent healthcare and sustainable healthcare practices for locals. The Dubai Health Authority launched the ‘Dubai Healthcare Experience’ programme in 2016 that proclaimed aims such as making Dubai among the top 10 destinations in the world for medical tourism, and to attract half a million international patients by 2020. “It isn’t about beating another system,” Princess Haya is quick to point out, though. “His Highness Sheikh Mohammed always says we want to be the first because you can’t sell being second to people, and when you’re trying to motivate a huge community, it’s the best way to do it.”

A keen focus on education is another way in which the DHCA is trying to enable Sheikh Mohammed’s dream of building a community and pushing Dubai into the top 10 destinations for medical tourism. The Mohammed Bin Rashid University of Medicine & Health Sciences and the

Hamdan Bin Mohammed College of Dental Medicine were set up so that Dubai could educate the next generation of healthcare professionals, meaning there is a student campus feel as well to the area. It’s also a canny way to make sure that Dubai is not forever reliant on foreign expertise and research in healthcare (see more on pg 26). “DHCC is not a quick flash in the pan, it’s sustainable for the future,” says Princess Haya, citing being able “to provide young people who can talk and be respected and make huge contributions to the medical community as equals going forward” as an ideal very dear to her and Sheikh Mohammed.

Indeed, she’s keen to highlight that to any organisation thinking of setting up a healthcare partnership in Dubai. “The days of lending brand names in exchange for money are gone,” says Princess Haya. “Now healthcare is based on real partnerships and real exchange of ideas and services both ways, and it means that kind of relationship isn’t going to be short-term.”

Plugging the gaps in healthcare services in Dubai has been the main focus so far, such as specialist paediatrics. Cardiology, oncology, rehabilitation and services aimed at helping manage and prevent the growing epidemics of obesity and diabetes in the emirate have also been areas Dubai is keen to receive help in addressing. Disease prevention control is also a priority as “we’re a transit area for about 25 million passengers, so developing protocols on dealing with epidemics was something we wanted to look at very closely” according to the princess.

She is unable to comment on the particulars of desired services for phase 2 as the details are still being ironed out, but she emphasises that the strategic vision is all about preventative care.



22m sq. ft.  
the size of  
phase 2 of DHCC



Foreign investors and providers looking to come into the emirate and provide these services in partnership are urged to come “with an open mind” and to be “completely clear about what you want to achieve in return”. The princess underlines that a good partnership with the emirate requires “honesty and clarity”, but promises that “real money can be made” if such a partnership is pursued.

She is very complimentary about the Alder Hey Hospital and their approach to partnering with Dubai to create the Al Jalila Children’s Specialty Hospital. “They have a very personal approach to all of their patients, and they haven’t been given everything on a silver platter,” she explains, with evident admiration for the fact the Liverpool-based hospital, without the international fame of London, has had to build its own brand rather than inherit one. As a result they have “some really interesting and practical solutions” for providing first-class paediatric care.

And practical solutions are very much a must. Princess Haya acknowledges that one key challenge of creating a hub designed to attract so much talent from overseas is that it does create a melting pot of different points of view.

For instance, how do you decide what is best practice when your clinical staff come from multiple countries, all with different ideas as to what that actually is?

“Going over regulation, understanding different levels of approval, having different cultures working side-by-side within hospitals – it threw up things we didn’t expect in the beginning,” says Princess Haya. “I don’t think that’s a challenge that’s ever been faced before in one place. It’s not about integrating two systems, but rather three or four.” She believes these wrinkles have mostly been ironed out now with the multicultural nature of DHCC “completely accepted and the norm, which is really cool”.

So, can Dubai achieve the status of a top healthcare destination in the world? It’s still very much early days, but the focus on marrying state-of-the-art facilities with foreign intellectual talent and in-country education is a very sensible way to go about it. “There’s real hope based on genuine progress and a well thought out economically viable plan. There’s innovation, there’s energy and fun,” argues Princess Haya. She pauses, before laughingly adding. “And we’ve got sun, which ultimately makes a huge difference.” ■

