



# Taibah University

## Journal of Taibah University Medical Sciences

www.sciencedirect.com



Editorial Article

## Evolution of the accreditation program for healthcare organizations in KSA: From present to future

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Received 7 September 2023; accepted 11 October 2023; Available online 21 October 2023

### المخلص

ممارسة الطب المبني على الأدلة والبراهين العلمية المثبتة حجر أساس لتقديم رعاية طبية ذات جودة عالية وبالتالي الوصول إلى نتائج صحية مرضية، ولهذا تفرض العديد من الدول برامج اعتماد في القطاع الصحي. إحدى هذه البرامج هو سباهي في المملكة العربية السعودية، والعديد من الدراسات ربطت حصول المنشأة الصحية على اعتماد سباهي مع تحقيقها لنتائج إيجابية في الرعاية الطبية، وبالرغم من ذلك هناك تحديات في مجال اعتماد المنشآت الصحية داخل المملكة العربية السعودية، منها التباين والتنوع في مواقع و جودة الرعاية الصحية المراد تقييمها وأيضاً طبيعة وسرعة تطور قطاع الرعاية الصحية مما يؤدي إلى ظهور تحديات مختلفة. ومحاولة سباهي في التغلب على هذه التحديات تظهر من خلال تطوير معايير التقييم، والحصول على الاعتماد الدولي، وتدريب المقيمين لتقييم المنشآت الصحية في جميع أنحاء المملكة العربية السعودية، نجاح هذه الجهود سيساعد في تعزيز مصداقية نظام الرعاية الطبية في السعودية على تقديم رعاية ذات جودة عالية وبالتالي تصبح مقصداً علاجياً عالمياً.

### Abstract

Delivering high-quality care is a cornerstone of achieving satisfying health outcomes, and evidence-based medicine is the basis for doing so. For that, some governments mandate accreditation programs for the healthcare sector. One of these programs is CBAHI in KSA (SA),

and many studies have shown positive healthcare outcomes associated with CBAHI accreditation in SA. While these achievements indicate progress, challenges remain. Variability in the quality of healthcare services across different regions of SA is a concern. Furthermore, the fact that healthcare is a complex industry that is rapidly evolving poses many challenges. CBAHI tries to overcome these challenges by continuously developing standards, obtaining international accreditation, and training surveyors to assess healthcare facilities across SA. The success of these efforts will help enhance the SA healthcare system's credibility and attract international patients who are seeking high-quality care.

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### Introduction

Delivering high-quality care is a cornerstone of achieving satisfying health outcomes, and evidence-based medicine is the basis for doing so. Emphasizing evidence-based medical practice is part of the policymaker's job, and to support that effort, some governments mandate accreditation programs for the healthcare sector.<sup>1</sup> The benefits of these programs include making sure that healthcare facilities are following the relevant best practices and keeping their knowledge current. The accreditation standards are met when quality care and patient safety have been documented.<sup>2,3</sup>

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Peer review under responsibility of Taibah University.



Production and hosting by Elsevier

The first accreditation program was established in the United States in 1951, when the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) was established.<sup>4</sup> JCAHO was built on the latest evidence for the purpose of improving and encompassing all forms of healthcare service delivery. Gradually the concept of accreditation was adopted in many countries, and today more than 100 countries have accreditation programs.<sup>1,5</sup> Many of these programs seek accreditation themselves by an international accreditation and recognition program. However, the only healthcare-specific program that accredits the accreditors is the International Accreditation Program (IAP), which was established in 1999 by the International Society for Quality in Health Care (ISQua).<sup>6</sup> ISQua is a not-for-profit, independent organization that promotes high-quality healthcare, and it works closely and in an official capacity with the World Health Organization.<sup>7</sup>

In 2012, ISQua certified the Saudi Central Board for Accreditation of Healthcare Institutions (CBAHI) for the CBAHI's 2nd edition of national standards for hospitals.<sup>8</sup> Currently, CBAHI has been granted triple IAP's from ISQua as the Surveyor Learning Program, and External Evaluation Organization in (National Hospital standards, Primary care standards, Clinical Laboratories & Blood Bank standards and Ambulatory care standards).<sup>9</sup> This indicates that CBAHI has undergone significant changes in recent years. To learn more about these changes, we will discuss the current state of the accreditation programs held by CBAHI and the prospects for CBAHI in KSA.

### Current status

CBAHI is working to achieve competence in various domains. The goals are to develop healthcare standards and programs and to gain international recognition for the organization and to recruit and train professionals who can conduct surveys of healthcare facilities in KSA.<sup>10</sup> Currently, CBAHI has seven accreditation programs, National Hospital Accreditation Program (NHP), Primary Healthcare Center (PHC) Accreditation Program, Clinical Laboratories & Blood Bank program (CLBB), Ambulatory Healthcare program (AMB), National Standards for Dental Centers, National Standards for Home Healthcare Services, and National Standards for Acute Coronary Syndrome Services.<sup>11</sup> CBAHI has played a crucial role in spearheading the accreditation programs.<sup>12</sup> One notable sign of its commitment to hospital accreditation is that the number of hospitals met CBAHI standards in KSA has increased; as of 2018, more than 75 % had achieved CBAHI requirements of the Essential Safety Standards. This was a substantial improvement over previous years and demonstrated the growing recognition and participation of hospitals in the accreditation program.<sup>13</sup> Accreditation is becoming a significant factor in the Saudi Arabian healthcare system.

Furthermore, research studies have shown positive outcomes associated with hospital accreditation in KSA.<sup>14,13</sup> For example, a study conducted by Alsaedi et al., in 2019 assessed the impact of accreditation on healthcare quality measures in Saudi Arabian hospitals. The findings revealed that accredited hospitals exhibited improved patient outcomes,

including decreased nosocomial infections, and higher rates of the safe use of medications.<sup>14</sup>

While these achievements indicate progress, challenges remain. Variability in the quality of healthcare services across different regions of KSA is a concern. A study by Almalki et al. found disparities in the quality performance of hospitals across Saudi regions, underscoring the need for standardized quality measures and improved consistency.<sup>15</sup> To address this challenge, CBAHI has been actively working to establish regional accreditation offices. These offices provide local support, guidance, and training to healthcare organizations in their respective regions, aiming to promote a more uniform quality of care throughout KSA.

The fact that healthcare is a complex industry that is rapidly evolving poses many challenges for the accreditation process. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted healthcare services, procedures, and policies; this has pushed CBAHI to take drastic yet creative measures to circumvent the adverse consequences of the pandemic. As a result, CBAHI developed a plan to enhance the accreditation process's efficiency and improve its effectiveness. It conducted a retrospective analysis and prospective testing through pilot visits to different categories of hospitals. Based on the results, it managed to reduce the duration of the visits from 3 days to 1 day while maintaining the survey's integrity.

### Future prospects

In the future, hospital accreditation program in KSA should embrace consistent quality and strive to bring the standardization and implement mechanisms to bridge gaps in consistency. Additionally, the program should adapt to the evolving healthcare landscape. Emerging trends such as telemedicine, personalized medicine, and digital health solutions require the inclusion of new criteria and assessment methodologies. The program needs to keep pace with advancements in healthcare technology and align its standards accordingly.

Some of the critical areas of focus for the future are strengthening the regional collaborations among hospitals, healthcare providers, and regulators through sharing the best practices and lessons learned to help raise the overall quality of healthcare services throughout the country. Also, it is important to integrate technology-related standards and criteria into the hospital accreditation standards and adopt a patient-centered approach through the continuous performance improvement activities.

The government of KSA is going through changes and transformations. They started with the announcement of the Saudi Vision 2030 and the associated roadmap of strategies for reaching the program's goals.<sup>16</sup> The aim was to motivate all sectors to reach a higher level of productivity and efficiency. This transformation strategy is being put into place for many programs, including the Health Sector Transformation Program. The program was established to ensure the continued development of healthcare services in KSA. The principle of value-based care that provides transparency and improves health services is being adopted to increase the satisfaction of beneficiaries. The program aims to improve access to health services through optimal coverage and a comprehensive and equitable geographical distribution,

expanding the provision of e-health services and digital solutions and improving the quality of health services. In addition, it will focus on the satisfaction of beneficiaries by implementing and following the best evidence-based international standards.<sup>16</sup> CBAHI is playing a vital role by developing standards, obtaining international accreditation, and training surveyors to assess healthcare facilities across KSA. Also, there are plans for improving healthcare capabilities and embracing evidence-based practice by developing an accreditation program for telehealth and disease specific certification.<sup>17</sup> Also, a five years ambitious plan to develop over 20 more specific programs e.g., stroke, renal dialysis, Autism, etc.

## Conclusion

The hospital accreditation program in KSA is continuously evolving, addressing challenges, and embracing opportunities, and this has meant that substantial strides have been made in promoting the quality of healthcare and safety of patients. Also, gaining international recognition can enhance the credibility of the Saudi Arabian healthcare system. These efforts will help attracting international patients seeking high-quality care. Ultimately, it will benefit patients, healthcare providers, and the nation, positioning KSA as a leader in delivering world-class healthcare services.

**Abbreviations:** CBAHI, the Central Board for Accreditation of Healthcare Institutions; JCAHO, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations; IAP, the International Accreditation Program; ISQua, the International Society for Quality in Health Care.

## Source of funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

## Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

## Ethical approval

Ethical approval is not required for the letter to the editor.

## Authors' contribution

MH conceived the idea, DA and MH wrote the initial draft of the article. AA, SA and ME critically revised the final draft. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

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**How to cite this article:** M. Alshathri D, F. Alsuhaimi A, A. Alwahabi S, M. Elmaghrabi M, A. Hussein M. Evolution of the accreditation program for healthcare organizations in KSA: From present to future. *J Taibah Univ Med Sc* 2024;19(1):130–132.