

Editorial**Approval of Muharraq Hospital****Jaffar M Al Bareeq, DLO, RCP, RCS ***

The government of Bahrain had approved the building of a general hospital in Muharraq, which has several advantages compared to a health center. It was an important step been waiting for. It is an important development for upgrading the medical services in Muharraq. The Island does not have a hospital, save, a remnant of the British Royal Navy, which is used, as maternity hospital and geriatric center. The island deserves a hospital for a long time because it is congested, and it has one of the highest densities in the world. The new hospital, not only will provide a health service to the population of Muharraq, but also will reduce the load on Salmaniya Medical Center, which is an already overloaded hospital. A hospital that provide a tertiary service, to nearly three-quarters of million. There was no new government general hospital built since the late seventies (1979).

Muharraq Island never had a general hospital, save four health centers. A population of 103,576 truly deserves a general hospital. Muharraq is by far is the most congested Island of the archipelago of 33 Islands of Bahrain, which has a total area of 700 sq.km and a population of 650,604, according to 2001 census. The inhabitants of Muharraq are about sixth of Bahrain population, living on an area of 31.99 sq.km, that is 4.57% of the total area of Bahrain. In Muharraq there are 46,341 females with their medical requirement. Twenty eight percent of the total population in Muharraq is pediatric age group with their special medical needs. The majority of its population is from the middle and limited income families, which means that they cannot afford the fees of private medical care. Bahrain has high density compared to other countries (909 person/sq.km). Yet Muharraq Island has a density of 3227 persons/sq.km, this is one of the highest in the world. For this reason and many others it needs a hospital.

The new hospital may be used as another institution for training. It can be used for training doctors, nurses and paramedics. It will be the third teaching hospital on the Island. The medical school has increased the admission number of medical students, but the hospitals on the Island have neither increased in number nor in their facilities. We need more hospitals for training doctors and teaching medical students. To build more hospitals now, is great investment for the future, in which we might not be able to build. Let us remember that the government of Egypt was under great criticism, when it built the ten thousands bed of Kaser Alaini. That

* Chief Editor

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hospital has become great investment for the Egyptian people from the Seventies onward and the government of Egypt would never be able to dream of building such hospital with the present budget restraints

The new hospital will be another institution and source of research. So far we have one major source of research, that is the Salmaniya medical center. Very few research papers from military hospital and rare from the private hospitals which has been encouraged by the ministry of health as substitute for expanding its service for an increasing population. It is said, "that a hospital, which is not doing research or studies, is not improving its quality of care delivery." Let us remember that research is a devise by which you judge the progress of a nation. It is painful fact that Israel spends more on research than what all the Arab countries combined together. The first minister of health, Dr. Ali Fakhroo (1978), was the only one to established a budget for research, that was in response to our frequent and insistent solicitation, though, it is small and meager amount of \$26525, but it was there for the researchers in the field of health. What happened afterward, when he was transferred to the ministry of education? The idea died down and buried in the corridors of some bureaucrats, who believe that there is no need for research in our country, all what we need is to borrow the research result done in the west and apply it here. A nation without research stays behind as dependent, non-creative and even dull consumer. If a director of research were appointed at that rather than research committee, the idea probably would not have died down.

Muharraq hospital will be a break-through for the already congested employment of Doctors, particularly the promotion of the chief residents to consultants, which has become a bottleneck. The number of consultants posts available compared to junior in training posts is so small, which forced the ministry of health to issue a contract to the junior in training conditioned that "no guarantee of employment after training years". Besides that, it is unfair, to embark on training of highly qualified physician without a guarantee of employment, which could result into great social and professional upheaval. But, if, the health services are allowed to expand, it will help in absorbing the prospective consultants for many years.

Bahrain has been building health centers since the 60's modeled on the Chinese and Soviet Union revolution, which have invented the idea of health center to satisfy the demand of the population with the limited resources allotted to health services. The policy of building health centers has never been challenged or reviewed by a panel of researches for its competency and suitability to Bahrain. No comparative study had been done in Bahrain between a health center and regional hospital; no study comparing the cost of running a health center and regional hospital and most important, no study to evaluate the competency of diagnostic value between the two.

Bahrain is not like China or Soviet Union, both are vast countries, with limited resources allocated for health. Health is not their first priority; probably it may be their third or fourth priority after the military. In these two countries the distances are great, between one city and the other is 24 hours by train, therefore they resorted to health centers to satisfy their needy, otherwise impoverished populous.

Muharraq is the second major island of Bahrain. It is the portal of entry to Bahrain, and where Bahrain international airport is located. If a major medical disaster happens in the airport - fallen airplane, collision between two planes, a terrorist act - the tragedy will be double folded if no hospital exist nearby.

In conclusion, The question remains do we need more health centers? Or do we need regional hospitals? Would it not be better convert all the health centers in Bahrain to regional hospitals and let the governance run them according to the need of its population? In that way we provide a better health services to the people of Bahrain, save money from the overseas training and treatment budget and we provide an ideal module of health to the Arab World. It would cost the ministry of health nothing to appoint an independent panel to study the idea and its feasibility. Is there anything wrong in the recreation of the health board, which used in the past to looks into the health issues in Bahrain?