

The Government healthcare specialists privately report that they see no possibility of any improvement until and unless there are real changes in the marriage customs.

Medical practitioners recognize that in KSA they face many genetic problems related to consanguinity, which includes all 5 most serious mentioned above. Senior medical staff unofficially report statistics concerning these problems but accept that marriage practices rules out any immediate banning of close relative marriages. Marriage between first cousins and in general Men and Women who have a blood relative is very common.

In a report produced recently for the Healthcare exhibition in Dubai it was noted that the Kingdom is the largest market in the Middle East for pharmaceuticals capturing 65% of the Gulf region sales. 99% of the Kingdom's needs are imported, there are no barriers to imports, and pharmaceuticals are exempt from duty. Over 2,000 outlets require a wide range of drugs and pharmaceuticals, herbal products and cosmetic pharmaceuticals.

It is reported that about 52% of marriages take place between blood relatives – 41% first cousins and 11% other relatives. There has been a small decline in popularity of such marital unions among young educated Women.

With regard to population increases, the report indicates that there appears to be a significant decline in fertility levels since the mid 1980's. A decrease from 7.5 births per wife in 1990, to around 5.4 births by 1997. Causes of fertility decrease may include reduced per capital income, the growing number of single women who decline to be married and a greater knowledge and use of contraception.

Infant mortality however is still higher than anything experienced in the West, at 21 deaths per 1000 births.

Many of these factors point to urgent health education needs for young women, mothers and the family generally.

Surprisingly dental health care is not considered a priority in the Saudi family, and this seems to be reflected in the number of dentists at 1.6 per 10000 population.

All these pointers suggest that there are great opportunities in primary health care, education and screening.

For UK companies specializing in providing the services in these areas, the MOH and other health care institutions would welcome British expertise

IN THE PRESS:

Tourism partnerships to enhance Saudi Health Tourism Industry



Saudi Arabia is set to further enhance its position as an international leader in the field of health tourism as a result of The Supreme Commission for Tourism's promotion of public-private sector partnerships.

In the case of health tourism, this will ultimately provide a 'one-stop-shop' for the thousands of people who visit the Kingdom each year to receive medical treatment. Saudi Arabia is renowned for providing sophisticated healthcare services for the treatment of all general as well as highly specialised medical conditions.

"We are committed to enhancing our medical care services by offering complete arrangements through co-operation between health practitioners, hotels, travel agencies and tour operators, all of which can be tailored to suit a range of budgets," said His Royal Highness, Prince Abdul Aziz bin Fahad bin Abdulla, Deputy Secretary General of Saudi Arabia's Supreme Commission for Tourism (SCT) for Investment and Marketing. "Such arrangements will ensure comprehensive packages which will include accommodation, transportation and optional tours to complement world-class medical treatment facilities and expertise," he added.

Saudi Arabia's plans to enhance its health tourism product were endorsed by its participation in the First International Health Tourism and Holidays Exhibition which took place in Bahrain at the end of 2003. Led by the Supreme Commission for Tourism, delegates included some of Saudi Arabia's largest hospitals and medical centres as well as the Ministry of Health.

Hotel, travel agencies and tour operators also participated.

The medical insurance industry in Saudi Arabia is also of great strategic relevance to health tourism, and one of the participants at the event - announced that is now offering policies to religious pilgrims as part of religious travel packages, to provide medical insurance coverage in case of any injuries during pilgrimage trips.