



# Patient-Centered Approach in Saudi Healthcare System: Systematic Review

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## ABSTRACT

Patient-centered care has the potential to improve care, enhance patient satisfaction, and increase the number of individuals seeking healthcare in any healthcare system. This paper using the narrative synthesis through systematic review for relevant literature following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. The findings revealed the benefits, challenges, and the strategies to implement of patient centered approach. The main benefits of patient centered approach are increasing utilization of preventive care and enhance health outcomes. On the other hand, the main challenges were the existing medical education curricula that focus on disease treatment without involvement patient or his family, and also financial support, institutional culture are considered significant challenges to implement patient centered approach. Finally, the findings from the relevant literature showed that the best strategies to implement patient centered approach through training and education of healthcare professional, enhancing communication and shared decision making, incorporating patient feedback and satisfaction surveys, and improving access and continuity of care.

**Keywords:** Patient-centered, Quality, Saudi Arabia, Healthcare, Strategy

## INTRODUCTION

A healthcare system centered around the patient is a design that looks like this to offer an effective treatment in a caring, supportive and respectful environment (Wasim et al., 2023). The system should be tailored and coordinated to the needs of the patient— these are basic essentials. This idea isn't a novel one; it's actually an evolved reform being made to the existing health system in Saudi Arabia. Policies on patient-centered care will need to take evidence-based approach— delivering accessible and safe health services for all groups of patients is a top priority (Grover et al., 2022). A systematic review would be carried out on these policies that are being implemented by Ministry of Health (MOH) this process will be quite vital in assessing if the set goals have been achieved as intended through outcomes realized towards improving patient care quality. This article seeks to examine the importance and challenges in implementing a patient-centered approach in healthcare settings in Saudi Arabia.

### **Saudi Healthcare System: Overview**

Saudi Arabia faces unique healthcare challenges with a rapidly growing and aging population, an increase in chronic diseases, and high patient expectations (Alkhamis & Miraj, 2021). Transforming health care to provide better value for money is critical to the nation's economy, businesses, and the health and well-being of families. The combination of fiscal discipline and rapid population growth, coupled with changing disease dynamics, has led governments to place a high priority on improving the effectiveness and capacity of healthcare (Rahman & Al-Borie 2021). The Ministry of Health is committed to improving the functioning of the current healthcare system and working to merge healthcare services with health insurance (De et al. 2020).

In 2000, the MOH launched a series of healthcare reform programs to achieve more with the same resources, improve quality of care, and implement inter-sectoral approaches to health. The first Health

Care Reform Program was designed to increase the efficiency of healthcare service delivery by strengthening management, community involvement in planning and evaluation, and improving the quality of clinical and supportive services. This was encouraged at both policy and provider levels with financial incentives and support for health research.

Saudi Arabia implemented its National Policy for Health in 1990 in response to escalating healthcare costs and a perceived decline in the quality of healthcare services. The policy aims to strike a balance between the "financial sustainability, equity, efficiency, quality effectiveness, and accountability/community involvement" in the healthcare system (Abraham et al.2022). The legislation enabled the Ministry of Health (MOH) to increase its funding for healthcare and focus on developing human resources and infrastructure. It also provides guidelines for the private sector and other government agencies to "create the ethos and culture of health in all policies and sectors".

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

A comprehensive search was conducted in electronic databases including PubMed, Scopus, and the Saudi Digital Library. The search terms used were: ("patient-centered care" OR "patient-centered approach" OR "patient engagement" OR "patient involvement") AND ("Saudi Arabia" OR "Saudi healthcare system"). The systematic review for this study following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. Findings will be presented using narrative synthesis, with discussions on the most significant findings from review's findings. The search was limited to studies published in English or Arabic within the last 10 years. The study selection process was conducted through two independent reviewers screened titles and abstracts of identified studies for relevance. Full-text articles of potentially relevant studies were then reviewed for eligibility. Disagreements were resolved through discussion, and a third reviewer was consulted when consensus could not be reached.

## **RESULTS**

The importance of patient-centered approach arises from not only looking for the most effective way to address a patient's problem, but it is a philosophy of approaching the patient as a whole and improving patient involvement in decision making about their own care (Amin et al.2020). It is a reciprocal process involving policies, procedures, and behaviors that frame the way patients think about their health and health care and how providers approach their work. It complements and incorporates many of the other attributes of quality care, it includes aspects of competent, excellent, and culturally proficient care as found in the work of the Institute of Medicine and others on quality. Patient-centered care is primarily driven by internal values and the aspiration to make a positive impact, rather than being influenced by external factors or financial rewards (Yun et al.2022). Furthermore, it is regarded as a means to assist disadvantaged groups such as the economically disadvantaged, elderly individuals, individuals with complex medical requirements, and those with chronic illnesses (Stewart et al.2024). These particular populations frequently interact with the healthcare system, yet unfortunately face unfavorable outcomes and encounter discrepancies in the quality of care they receive. The emphasis on patient-centered care aims to address this issue by focusing on individuals who are inadequately informed or misinformed, and are less inclined to actively participate in decisions regarding their healthcare.

Patient-centered care is also viewed as a way to help vulnerable populations such as the poor, elders, those with complex needs and those with chronic diseases (Kuipers et al.2021). These populations often have more encounters with the healthcare system, yet experience poor outcomes and encounter disparities in care. This focus targets those who are under or misinformed and less likely to participate in decisions about their care. The literature revealed that patient-centered care results in increased utilization of preventive care (Heng et al.2020). Individuals who believe their healthcare provider has invested time and effort to understand them and address their concerns are more inclined to undergo routine tests and screenings for prevention. Patients who have confidence in their physician's intentions are more inclined to make decisions that have a favorable impact on their well-being. The incorporation of preventive care plays a vital role in achieving improved health outcomes and reducing healthcare expenses. (Yu et al.2023).

Better health outcomes are one of the most cited benefits of patient-centered care. Patients who are more actively engaged and actively involved in decisions regarding their health tend to make choices

that lead to better long-term health and overall well-being (Ahmed et al., 2020). When patients feel that their concerns, worries, and queries have been thoroughly and comprehensively addressed, they are more likely to wholeheartedly follow through with the recommended treatment plan in order to enhance their health outcomes, boost their recovery, and improve their quality of life in the long run. This collaborative approach, where patients become equal partners in their healthcare journey, not only empowers them but also promotes a sense of ownership and responsibility towards their own health. By having a greater sense of control and being active participants in their healthcare decisions, individuals can make informed choices that are more aligned with their unique circumstances and preferences, thereby leading to improved outcomes and a higher likelihood of adherence to the treatment plan (Al-Sahli et al.2021). Through the framework of patient-centered care, healthcare providers strive to create a nurturing and supportive environment where patients feel valued, heard, and respected, ensuring that their voices are not only acknowledged but also considered in every aspect of their medical journey. Ultimately, embracing patient-centered care as a foundational principle can pave the way for a holistic approach to healthcare, where patients and healthcare professionals work hand in hand to achieve optimal health outcomes and enhance the overall well-being of individuals. (Mason, 2022).

An exploratory study was carried out in the UK to investigate the views of South Asian and white European people on the quality of primary care and identify areas of potential need for development or improvement in services. Data was collected through focus groups and interviews as it was felt that the use of satisfaction surveys alone may not identify all issues of importance to these ethnic minority groups. This study found that there were both differences and similarities in the issues raised by both groups, and the use of qualitative methodology proved successful in enabling participation and capturing their views (Jafari et al.2021).

Saudi healthcare system is experiencing a higher level of reliance on foreign healthcare providers to address its staffing requirements. In many cases, institutions opt to hire healthcare professionals who have received training in different countries, aiming to replicate practices followed in the Western healthcare system. As a consequence, the presence of language barriers and divergent cultural expectations regarding healthcare delivery has emerged as a challenge between patients and providers. A study conducted by Peek et al. revealed that clinicians and patients from diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds often struggle with communication and establishing mutual understanding, consequently leading to patient discontentment. (Alluhidan et al.2020).

The existing medical education program and curricula in Saudi medical colleges place a higher priority on instructing students in disease treatment rather than on imparting patient care skills. This approach gives more importance to the actual treatment of the disease, rather than actively contributing to enhancing a patient's overall well-being. Mead and Bower conducted a study that revealed experienced general practitioners invest twice as much time on patient-centered care as compared to their trainee counterparts. This suggests that trainees may initially lean towards adopting a more biomedical approach, but gradually transition towards a patient-centered approach as they accumulate more experience in the field. (Butsch et al., 2020)(Liang, 2022).

Suboptimal financial support, institutional culture, educational curriculum, and communication and collaboration problems are key challenges to the adoption of a patient-centered approach in Saudi healthcare (Al-Sahli et al.2021). Patient-centered care is more time-consuming and often costs more than disease-centered care. Despite evidence that greater patient involvement in care leads to better health outcomes and wiser allocation of resources, major financial incentives in most healthcare systems are still for providers to do more rather than less, and to do with patients rather than to them. The situation is no different in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In general, healthcare financing in Saudi Arabia is an area in transition and any concomitant changes in mechanisms and level of funding a patient-centered approach is unlikely to receive priority attention (Alkhaibari et al., 2023).

The findings from the relevant literature showed that there are four effective strategies that can help to implement the patient-centered approach in any healthcare system. These strategies including the educational and training for healthcare professional, enhancing communication and decision making with patient or his family, the incorporating patient feedback and satisfaction surveys, and the four strategy is improving access and the continuity of care.

The focus on the educational and training for healthcare professional toward the importance of patient-centered can change the old paradigm that says a good healthcare professional is the one who

can give the best treatment and cure to the patient, to the new paradigm that says a good healthcare professional is the one who can satisfy the needs of the patient (Al-Sahli et al.2021). This can be seen if the training gives some motivation to the participants to provide the best services to needy and interface patients (Nayahangan et al., 2021). Normally, the training being held consists of seminars, CME points, and many more. The participants will gain valuable knowledge, experience, and input from the experts, and it will change their perspective in looking at the patients (Kuipers et al., 2021). Participants can also get important tips during communication with patients and how to involve patients in decision making regarding their health (Doyle et al.2021). Besides that, it also gives an advantage to the participants to ask what the ways are to involve and give the best treatment to patients, because patient-centered care has its own way to handle it (Wynne et al.2021).

The involvement, knowledge, and communication by healthcare providers directly influence patient expectations and confidence in the proposed treatment, so it is essential to adequately prepare the physicians through specific training with an aim to improve the doctor-patient interaction and ultimately the patient's health outcomes (El-Haddad et al., 2020). This approach will require commitment and system-wide change and will take time to implement but has great potential to substantially improve patient satisfaction and health outcomes (Ahmed, 2020). Saudi Arabia is a country with diverse cultural and religious beliefs, and there are numerous barriers that prevent effective communication between doctors and patients. These can include differing power distance expectations, detrimental doctor-patient relational continuity, incongruence between the doctors and the patients' values, and desired level of disclosure (Albalawi et al., 2020).

Patient feedback and satisfaction surveys are an important way to receive information from patients directly regarding their preferences and experiences with the healthcare system (Wong et al., 2020). This feedback can help identify areas in need of improvement, but research has shown that patient feedback and satisfaction can be extensively influenced by cultural backgrounds, in addition to education, age, personality traits, and expectations. For this reason, it may be difficult to gather feedback and satisfaction information from the diverse population in Saudi Arabia even with direct questioning, especially as inpatients are often less likely to complain about treatment or services, they have received due to strong cultural influences on patient behavior.

Finally, a system needs to be put in place to track the changes in the health of the Saudi population and the quality of care they receive. This information is vital in determining whether or not the changes being made are effective. In order to improve access to care in Saudi Arabia, policy makers can make a number of changes. They need to increase the number of primary care physicians so that they can serve as the first contact for patients seeking care and help coordinate any necessary further treatment. They also need to encourage those who are highly specialized to move back into primary care. Measures can be taken to reduce the urban/rural disparity in care by moving physicians to rural areas and offering incentives. Creating a more defined work schedule and reducing the number of on-call hours for physicians can improve continuity of care and make it easier for patients to see their own doctor. This would involve a restructuring of the healthcare system and changes in the physician culture but is essential in preventing chronic disease and providing effective treatment.

## **DISCUSSION**

Studies have shown that patient involvement in care is associated with positive outcomes (Kwame & Petrucka, 2021). There are numerous implications and considerations to the methods that will help realize patient-centered care in Saudi. It can enable the alignment of policy with patient needs, improve the quality and functionality of services, help those with chronic conditions, and ultimately give them a higher and more satisfactory quality of life. It can also reduce disparities and improve the health of populations.

With the recognition of patient-centered care as a means to increase quality, efficiency, and added value for patients across the continuum of care, this concept has led to the development of tools and approaches to help realize and practice patient-centered care. Primary care physicians should foster patient-centered communication and shared decision-making to convey concern and increase adherence to recommended treatments and enable patients to make informed choices about their care. The importance of patient involvement in care is not just making decisions about treatment but patients participating fully in all aspects of their care with clinical staff. These tools and strategies are a means to encourage and enable patients to participate more fully in decision-making.

From the systematic review, patient-centered care is considered as a major part of efforts to reform healthcare as a means to improve quality, support the chronic care model, and increase the accountability of care. Most studies on patient-centered care examine opinion and satisfaction-based measures and do not provide convincing evidence regarding the effects of patient-centered care on objective measures of patient care.

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