

Outlines of the strategic plan for health professions education in Saudi Arabia

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Background: The Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia was adopting AFAQ project to create a long term strategic plan for higher education for the coming 25 years. One of the main themes of the project was the future plan for health professions education (HPE).

Objectives: 1. to evaluate the undergraduate HPE outcomes. 2. to Study the undergraduate HPE trends in developed countries and devising special trends for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. 3. to delineate the features of futuristic study plans that conform to the modern trends of undergraduate health education and fulfill societal needs of qualified personnel. 4. to Study the educational environment in health colleges and recommend appropriate reform strategies.

Methods: Qualitative & quantitative methods were used. More than 1200 references were reviewed.

Main findings: Ratio of practicing health professionals to the entire population was 1:577 for physicians, 1:35 for dentists, 1:1739 for pharmacists, 1:568 for nurses and 1:1366 for applied medical sciences specialists. Saudis in health professions were 21.4%, 15.9% and 14.4% for physicians, dentists and pharmacists, respectively. There was a great need to teach communication skills as an integral part of the main curriculum. Students' perceptions about educational environment showed significant problems in the educational environment of all health colleges. Most study plans were old and traditional, also lacking essential concepts and skills of practicing health professionals.

Recommendations: Review and update of curricula. Involving the student in the learning process through problem-based learning, electronic learning, and self-directed learning. Student assessment tools must be of high validity and reliability and directed to the educational objectives. Attention to attitudes and concepts. Training on important social and educational skills. Attention to faculty development programs. Other strategic options were discussed.