Collaborative Solutions for Global Health Care Challenges

Partners HealthCare is an internationally recognized integrated academic healthcare system based in Boston, MA.

Partners was founded in 1994 by Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) and Brigham and Women’s Hospital (BWH), the two largest teaching hospitals of Harvard Medical School. The Partners system also includes community and specialty hospitals, a managed care organization, a physician network, community health centers and long-term care services.

Partners has long been a model for the delivery of safe, high quality healthcare services. In 2015, MGH was named the #1 hospital in the United States by U.S. News & World Report, while BWH was ranked #6.

The Partners promise is to provide the highest standard of care to our patients; to educate, train and empower a high-performance workforce; to discover and deploy life-changing innovations through research; and to serve the needs of the local, regional and global community.

Partners HealthCare International (PHI) was founded in 1997 to extend that promise to the global community.

Leveraging the resources, knowledge, and expertise of Partners’ Harvard-affiliated academic medical centers, as well as those from the wider Partners system, PHI works collaboratively with healthcare systems around the globe to develop long-term, sustainable solutions for the most pressing challenges in healthcare.

Our vision is that these relationships will not only help to solve immediate issues such as the uneven growth of healthcare services and the need for more highly trained healthcare personnel, but that they will ultimately become a long-term platform for collaborative research, capacity building, knowledge sharing and clinical care.
Health Care Challenges in Emerging Economies

The rapid growth in emerging economies such as India, China, Malaysia and the Gulf States has led to the rise of new middle class markets with more purchasing power and an increased demand for high quality healthcare services.1

The types of health services that are in demand have shifted as well. Due to the changes in social structures, diet and lifestyle that have accompanied this rapid economic development, metabolic diseases such as diabetes and obesity, along with cardiovascular disease, have soared in these countries.3 Asia now accounts for more than 60 percent of the world’s diabetes population.4 In the Middle East and North Africa, 1 in 10 adults has diabetes.5

The new demand for healthcare services has largely been unmet, however, due to significant qualitative and quantitative gaps in available care. Some of these gaps have resulted from a shift from public to private models of healthcare delivery.

Traditionally, the public sector or nonprofit trusts and foundations have played a dominant role in healthcare delivery in emerging markets. The private sector’s involvement in the delivery of healthcare in these markets is growing, however.6

While there is a role in healthcare for both public and private models, the increased privatization of health services in countries with emerging economies has presented new challenges to the delivery of quality, across-the-board care.

Due to the need of private systems to produce commercial returns and support growth, development of new private sector healthcare services has been primarily located in urban areas, where the majority of the middle class population is located. This has lead to a significant inequality in the access to and the quality of care in rural areas.

Furthermore, the increased demand for services related to cardiovascular disease, metabolic lifestyle disease, cancer and motor vehicle accident-related trauma in these emerging economies has resulted in the development of high quality tertiary care services to treat these conditions. This has unfortunately come at the expense of certain fundamental services, however.

Public health and primary care have been left to the public sector and governments to fund and deliver and are lagging behind in financing and development. Mental health services are poorly developed as well. Due to insufficient primary care services, disease prevention suffers and patients end up going to the hospital for most of their illnesses, and at much later point.2

The rising demand for health care services, coupled with the rapid development of new facilities to meet these needs, has also exacerbated a pre-existing shortage in healthcare personnel. This shortage is estimated to reach 12.9 million in the coming decades.7

Recognizing the need to respond to these pressures, many healthcare systems in emerging economies have started to develop new models of healthcare delivery. However, these changes are occurring in a fragmented fashion and their system-wide impact has yet to be observed.2

New approaches are needed to make sustainable long-term improvements that can address current demands and build high quality healthcare systems that are sustainable into the future.
System-Wide Approaches to High Quality Healthcare

High quality healthcare systems put quality of care and patient safety at the core. Patient communication and education are central to the success of the system, and hospital care and length of stay are minimized by early intervention and prevention measures.

Often, this involves improving and developing new, state-of-the-art healthcare facilities in emerging economies that are experiencing unprecedented growth. The China health care market, for example, has faced many challenges, including overcrowded hospitals, an underdeveloped primary health care system, and a shortage of trained physicians and other clinical staff, all of which has led to growing dissatisfaction among consumers.

In 2010, China began the transition from a predominantly government-run public health care system to one that is now decentralized and open to private and foreign investment.⁸

This has set the stage for the development of the Jiahui International Hospital (JIH), a new and innovative model of health care in China that is centered on family, community, and a stronger connection between the patient and the caregiver.

In its collaborative partnership with JIH, PHI leverages the vast knowledge available throughout the Partners HealthCare network, which includes unmatched capabilities in oncology, neurosurgery, cardiovascular disease, cutting-edge radiation therapy, women’s health, and orthopedics.

Initial work with the team has focused on hospital planning, innovative models of care delivery, and recruitment and staffing models that will support attracting top clinicians.

Recognizing the challenges in healthcare markets like China and others mentioned above, PHI works to help emerging healthcare systems develop into high quality systems by collaboratively addressing healthcare challenges through initiatives in healthcare improvement, education and training, workforce development and system-specific programs that draw on the expertise at MGH and BWH, as well as the larger Partners network.

Below are some ways in which PHI is implementing Partners-wide, or system-specific, programs to help emerging health care systems effect lasting change:
Population Health Management

Population health management (PHM) is an innovative model of care developed by Partners with the goal of improving the overall health of patients while lowering the overall cost of care.

PHM includes strategies to improve patient access to care, redesign existing care models and to implement methods for measuring the effectiveness of these tactics. The goal is to diagnose and treat more patients at the earliest stages of a disease, where treatment is less likely to require costly in-patient hospital visits.

In Qatar, for example, PHI has partnered with the Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) to develop a new approach to treating gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM), a dangerous condition during pregnancy that can have a lifelong impact on mother and child.

PHI worked with HMC to create a collaborative specialty GDM clinic at their women’s hospital, which has facilitated outpatient treatment for GDM patients and the many visits they require.

Among other things, this new clinic has reduced the number of direct admissions from the obstetrics outpatient unit by 50 percent, resulting in increased bed availability throughout the hospital. The clinic has also helped to increase the number of patients using medication to control their blood sugar levels, and has improved patient self-monitoring and reporting. 

Research

A much newer area of international growth is in the development of international research-related partnerships, often around clinical and translational research, and more recently around technological development and innovation. The goal here is to expand the system’s research assets and capabilities, develop new technologies and solutions and get better positioned to attract new sources of research funding.

PHI works collaboratively with healthcare providers to create comprehensive research strategies and establish structures for the oversight and management of research programs that are clinically relevant and locally necessary.
Disaster Medicine, Emergency Medicine and Trauma

Providing a well-organized medical response is critical in disaster scenarios, as the timely distribution of care often means the difference between life and death. Knowing what to do before, during and after an emergency is critical.

In collaboration with the MGH Center for Disaster Medicine, PHI assists healthcare teams with every stage of the emergency planning process, from identifying key needs, to developing response strategies, to training and testing the response plans through interactive exercises.

In 2014, PHI partnered with HMC to create a system-wide incident response plan for the state-run health system of Qatar. The new plan ensured that there were clear lines of authority, a good division of workflow and good communications systems in place.

PHI then assisted HMC administrators in implementing an education and training phase for this plan, which included simulations to test response strategies and the further development of site-specific response plans.

Quality Improvement and Patient Safety

For top hospitals and healthcare systems, quality improvement and patient safety is part of a long-term strategy aimed at organization-wide improvements in patient care, professional staff development and service delivery.

PHI collaborates with healthcare organizations around the world to implement comprehensive programs that promote quality improvement and enhance patient safety, including management programs, assessment tools and accreditation preparation.

In 2001, PHI began a long-term partnership with Wockhardt Hospitals, Ltd. (WHL) in Mumbai, India. WHL engaged PHI for assistance in developing new training and education programs to support organizational development and quality improvement through the global WHL network.

The two organizations have worked together for more than a decade to develop an integrated care system that serves the needs of patients in India. Many of the improvements that they prompted are now considered best practices in India’s challenging and competitive healthcare environment.
Summary

The challenges of delivering high quality healthcare services in emerging economies have resulted in unique opportunities for long-term, collaborative partnerships between PHI and emerging healthcare systems.

The free exchange of ideas and information that results from these long-term relationships benefits both parties.

Rather than simply exporting one model for building healthcare systems to another location and trying to make that model work, the PHI team works collaboratively with local healthcare officials to find solutions that fit the unique needs of that setting. PHI faculty and staff have significant experience in developing healthcare solutions to address the rapidly growing healthcare needs in emerging economies.

By the same token, the challenges faced by emerging systems provide opportunities to develop new and flexible solutions for delivering high-quality, cost effective care. These challenges often lead to insights and innovations that help PHI advisors find solutions for their own healthcare challenges.

PHI envisions a global network of like-minded systems committed to the advancement of healthcare by sharing ideas, collaborating on solutions and developing innovative new program and service models.

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1 A Commentary by the Teaching and Learning Research Program: P Brown, H Lauder, and D Ashton; Sept 2008- see www.tlrp.org/proj/phase111/assoc_brown.html
3 Globalization of Diabetes. The role of Diet, Lifestyle and Genes; FBHu; Diabetes Care 34:1249–1257, 2011
7 Global health workforce shortage to reach 12.9 million in coming decades: WHO News Release G Thomas: November 11, 2013
9 Hamad Medical Corporation: Fostering rapid advances in quality for a national integrated healthcare system. See http://www.partners.org/Assets/Documents/International/CaseStudy_HMC_ENGLISH.pdf
10 A Reflection on a Decade of Partnership and Collaboration: Wockhardt Hospital/Partners HealthCare International