



# Social Responsibilities of Health Industry in Abu Dhabi, UAE

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## Abstract

Social responsibility (SR) has become an essential corporate practice across most organizations. The primary concept of being socially responsible is to ensure that industries engage in ethical operations and in a manner that benefits the surrounding communities. The objective of the current report was to assess the social responsibilities of the health industry in Abu Dhabi, UAE. Based on recent reviews; the study findings show increased awareness of being socially responsible across various hospital centers. Most facilities undertake regular voluntary care, creation of community awareness about health matters, and undertaken free medical screening during medical camps. However, the uptake of social responsibilities in Abu Dhabi is still low as some health care facilities continue to face funding problem. Other facilities lack the SR strategy in their business models further disadvantaging surrounding communities especially persons that are financially challenged to access regular medical care. In light of the current observations, the health industry in Abu Dhabi needs to do more needs in terms of policy change, partnering with the government, and seeking budgetary support to support social activities in Abu Dhabi on a regular basis

**Keywords:** Healthcare, Social responsibility, Ethics, Research, Management, Abu Dhabi

## Introduction

The objective of the current study was to examine the situation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) practice in the health industry in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Specific focus was limited to CSR practices in Abu Dhabi health care facilities with respect to four areas: perceptions and attitudes towards CSR, nature and level of CSR practice in Abu Dhabi, managers' awareness about CSR in Abu Dhabi health industry, and drivers and challenges health facilities face in CSR implementation (1). The study covered four aspects of CSR practice, including workplace, marketplace, natural environment, and the local communities. The study duration for the project was undertaken between February and March 2016. Data was collected from secondary sources undertook previously on managers and leaders of various health facilities based Abu Dhabi. As such, the study question was focused on examining, whether the healthcare industry in Abu Dhabi practices social responsibility (SR) in line with the expected global standards?

## Research Significance

The study hypothesizes that there is a significant gap between CSR and organizational awareness or even readiness to get involved in social responsibilities in Abu Dhabi by most health centers. Undertaking the current research is important for several reasons. Besides adding to the SR healthcare literature in Abu Dhabi, the paper highlights

how the surrounding community perceives the role of healthcare institutions of Abu Dhabi. Such an assessment is fundamental to the survival of the healthcare sector since its survival and sustainability depends on customer trust and loyalty. Moreover, health care institutions provide individuals with very important and sensitive services that affect their lives. However, some customers of medical services do not have the financial ability to pay for medical treatment and regular check-ups. In light of financial challenges that some people face in accessing quality care, the current report further elaborates why health institutions of Abu Dhabi have an obligation to assist the less privileged in developing the surrounding society.

## Research Aims and Objectives

The aim of the study was to explore if the healthcare industry in Abu Dhabi engages in adequate social responsibilities around the neighboring communities. The objectives of the study were to explore SR practices in Abu Dhabi health care facilities with respect to four areas:

- Employee and leaders' perceptions and attitudes towards SR
- The nature and level of SR practice in Abu Dhabi healthcare industry
- Managers' awareness about social responsibilities in Abu Dhabi Health Industry
- The drivers and challenges health facilities face in SR in Abu Dhabi

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The current study is unique from previous research because it details on four aspects of SR practice in Abu Dhabi in relation to the workplace, marketplace, natural environment, and the local communities. At the moment, there is no other study that has undertaken a SR research in health care industry in Abu Dhabi, thus making the present research a unique approach from past studies in the UAE. Having introduced the research questions, objectives, and research significance, the rest of the paper is arranged into four sections. First, the paper examines the literature on SR in the healthcare industry. Second, the report the research methods used in the study. Three, all the major findings from across Abu Dhabi healthcare facilities are discussed. Finally, the paper discusses the research findings and their implications, before offering conclusions and recommendations.

### Literature Review

SR has attracted significant attention across several organizations since the eighteenth century. Today, it is an unprecedented corporate engagement practice that seeks to improve the relation between managers, employees, and shareholders. Being socially responsible means that an organization is committed to its social operations to ensure sustainable growth, development, and improvement of the societal conditions (2). Even if there is no general consensus on the exact definition of the term 'social responsibility' (3-5), the term is commonly used to denote a mode of creating business value and engagement with an aim of fulfilling public, ethical, and legal, societal expectations (4,5). Simply stating, SR refers to a manner in which a healthcare industry will utilize its resources in efforts to benefit the underprivileged society.

According to the World Business Council, SR takes into account the commitment to ensure the society, family, employees, and the larger community benefits from the setup of industries near their locality (6). Other scholars have put it that SR is mainly concerned with setting programs, practices, and policies that are incorporated into business decision making and operations with an aim of ensuring an organization maximizes its beneficial impacts on the society (6,7). In the healthcare industry, SR has not fully attained systematic implementation because a number of challenges remain regarding service delivery and community involvement (7).

A number of factors also contribute to low intake of SR practices by the healthcare including the emergence of new diseases and medications, public awareness, media attention, increasing customer dissatisfaction, and continuous rise in the cost of healthcare (6). Elevated demands for better services, medical services, and pharmaceuticals are counterbalanced as a result of declining investment and a shortage of qualified or willing personnel (4,6). Considering a highly competitive consumer market, the healthcare industry is also faced with a challenge of competition where providers seek to provide high-quality care, but disquiet persists concerning accountability and transparency of the healthcare industry. Specifically, there are concerns

on how healthcare firms use their initial tax revenues in improving public health services. Scholars have raised the question of the extent healthcare governance models evolve in providing socially responsible workplaces (7,8). The primary conclusion is that SR should provide a comprehensive framework that can be referred when assisting the local community in offering services needed.

The services provided should be within the scope of the regular services that the hospitals or health centers provide to its consumers on day to day basis. Under this distinction, there are two different types of healthcare entities: those that are concerned with profit and non-profit ventures. Non-profit ventures do not receive residual profits but get much tax cuts and the surplus of their activities is committed to promoting community wellbeing in terms of better social services. However, both profit and non-profit ventures experience common challenges related to managing and understanding relationships with medical and management staff, connecting with different barriers and drivers of social engagement, and creating a balance between management responsibilities and board authority (4-6). Additional insights about awareness and governance of SR issues in the healthcare organization can be achieved from taking into account the related information from literature about integrated social responsibilities and clinical-public governance. Effective SR governance should be based more on what happens in the hospital and the clinic, and in the planning of delivering social services to communities that cannot afford specialized care services.

### Social Responsibility Awareness and Practice in Abu Dhabi

Healthcare service provision and development in Abu Dhabi is largely regulated by Abu Dhabi Health Services Company (SEHA). SEHA, directly and indirectly, manages and owns governmental hospitals and health services in Abu Dhabi. Recently, SEHA has been under pressure to cut its operational costs to meet competitive international pricing (4). SR of healthcare industry in UAE is twofold and can be considered regarding profitability and service outreach. On one hand, SEHA has an obligation or enhancing and protecting healthcare assets to maximize community wellbeing. On the other hand, SEHA has a duty to ensure judicious use of government resources in a manner that ensures equitable allocation and distribution of resources to all citizens and expatriates in need of care (2). Improving efficiency and controlling costs are of great significance to healthcare staff because the practice ultimately benefits the community. As a result, awareness about SR concept and its applicable activities is a key factor driving the success of healthcare institutions of Abu Dhabi.

For example, a recent report by Dubai Chamber of Commerce, (4) confirms a high level of SR awareness. An approximated 75% of the surveyed residents and healthcare providers of Abu Dhabi reported that they are aware of SR. Furthermore, 69% of the surveyed health care insti-

tutions in Abu Dhabi, or 27 out of the current 39 hospitals, reported that they engage in SR activities. Most of the SR activities include making a positive contribution to the Abu Dhabi society by acting in the best interests of the local communities (2). Similarly, the managers of the responding healthcare institutions expressed concern that not only should hospitals contribute to the wellbeing of the local communities, but also actively engage in an initiative likely to underwrite to such ends (2). According to Trainer (5), SR engagement by Abu Dhabi healthcare sector should be perceived as an investment instead of cost. According to a recent consumer reaction survey in Abu Dhabi, the healthcare SR engagement with the local community is limited to some activities (1). Most of the healthcare facilities limit their community service to the immediate local populations where they engage in various activities, such as improving general health, educating about fitness, wellness, security and safety (1,6,7). Additional clinical engagement includes monthly clinical camps to screen residents for chronic ailments such as cancer, renal disease, eye conditions, and subsequent follow-ups. Also, there are some charities where health facilities engage to help adults and children that have eyesight problems (7). Children from less privileged backgrounds with serious medical conditions like heart problems and lip palate also get medical support from charities. Lastly, the elderly in the community are supported to meet their medical and social problems through regular palliative care organized by healthcare charities (6). However, despite the increased involvement in SR by some healthcare facilities in Abu Dhabi, the current literature indicate a slow uptake of SR by most institutions as discussed below.

### **SR Uptake and Practice in Abu Dhabi Is Still Low**

A study that had been carried out by Rettab (2) on corporate SR across the seven emirates of UAE revealed that there was a low-level SR practice. Regarding Abu Dhabi healthcare sector, the study documented that an overwhelming majority of institutions (over 60%) failed to embrace SR practices and policies. The main SR failure was reported in areas of monitoring resource distribution in a manner that benefits the community, auditing, and reporting SR activities. Also, most of these institutions in Abu Dhabi lack SR-related targets and objectives meaning that most of the community services and medical camps were regularly held and not adequately planned to promote sustainability and community benefits. While 69% of the Abu Dhabi hospitals reported that SR is central to their operations, only 18% confirmed that SR is central to their business strategy (4,5).

These findings reveal that there is a substantial gap between SR readiness and organizations' awareness to get involved in community improvement. Also, there is a potential gap in their ability and willingness to realistically develop and execute SR initiatives in Abu Dhabi. Elbiss et al (8), note that lack of competence and capacity by Abu Dhabi healthcare institutions might contribute to the lack of capacity to initiate SR for the surrounding communi-

ties. As a result, scholars have voiced concern about the need for the government to initiate SR activities through additional funding and creation of awareness. The approach can be achieved under the guidance of the Executive Council, where Abu Dhabi hospitals can be encouraged to set objectives and goals of SR to meet the needs of the vulnerable persons (9).

Some of the vulnerable areas that have not been met in Abu Dhabi include the mental, physical, and spiritual needs of the old populations and the chronically ill persons. These almost forgotten aging populations need regular and constant care, a move that can be attained by establishing a connection between Abu Dhabi facilities and the community (10). Moreover, a closer and deeper partnership is needed between the physicians and the community. For instance, Abu Dhabi hospitals should put in place increased efforts to reach out to the surrounding communities once a week in efforts to provide critical education and screening services. These efforts can be achieved better by partnering with public health sector and create programs that encourage Abu Dhabi staff to take part in voluntary activities within the local community (8).

Such community engagements will ensure that the current low rate of SR practices in Abu Dhabi is improved to more regular activities that improve community wellbeing and health. Similarly, the healthcare sector in Abu Dhabi stands to benefit from numerous advancements that SR brings, such as improved customer reputation, better service management, effective resource utilization, and enhanced patient loyalty (6). On top of these, when hospitals in Abu Dhabi engages in SR activities, they also attained improved capacity to attract and retain competitive employees, attract investors and business partners, engage in responsive competitiveness, and better bottom-line financial growth (3). Therefore, engaging in SR is a central pillar that will improve Abu Dhabi's health industry that is rapidly expanding to meet global standards as elaborated below.

### **Abu Dhabi's Growing Health Sector and Expanding Community Needs**

Like other regions in UAE, Abu Dhabi has created healthcare infrastructure services largely recognized as on par with the global standards. The common health concerns facing the communities in Abu Dhabi are similar to those faced by most developed nations (2). Most health conditions are those caused by sedentary lifestyles and increased consumption of fast food, including diabetes and obesity. In addition, these conditions are on the rise including those that affect the aging populations in Abu Dhabi, such as cancer and diabetes (6). Meanwhile, Abu Dhabi healthcare system has strived to keep up with an increasing number of lifestyle diseases and controlling such conditions through public awareness and increased per-capita spending to meet community needs.

As the city strives to meet these healthcare goals under the leadership of SEHA, what is important to note is the important role that SR plays in the entire process. Addi-

tional SR spending and development should be emphasized as a key pursuit of Abu Dhabi's healthcare coverage plan. Meeting the needs of the local communities through well-developed SR practices will meet the UAE prospective of 2021 that seeks to ensure that all citizens get access to world-class healthcare, service, and expertise to meet the expectations and needs of the local communities (11). The health care report of Abu Dhabi for 2013 also focuses on ensuring better service provision to local communities in a manner that improves health care delivery, service availability, quality, and accessibility. The plan can be realized if the health industry in Abu Dhabi under the directions of SEHA puts in place strategic and significant investments to meet the population needs and propel the industry growth based on adequate management of common diseases (5).

Despite the growing health sector in Abu Dhabi, however, the common challenge of unmet community needs has been explained by Rettab et al (4). According to their study, they document that the small population in Abu Dhabi has largely affected the healthcare industry intention to promote SR practices. The gap still exists across UAE in areas of critical service provision and care, especially in the areas of women's care, diabetes care, pediatrics, and oncology (1). In most cases, Abu Dhabi residents have often sought care outside UAE in places like Singapore, Thailand, and India. The current transfer of capital has been reported to cost individual Emirate up to \$250 000 per visit (12-14). What such trends indicate is a lack of appropriate and comprehensive care facilities in Abu Dhabi or lack of regular SR services with which the residents are comfortable with while seeking social services.

As opposed to having patients seek care abroad, the health industry of Abu Dhabi should assess the key areas that need urgent attention and investment. The common areas that need more SR contributions include the need to support special needs individuals, supporting communities through aids and awareness creation, and promoting healthy lifestyles through public health initiatives. A recent study that carried out regarding Abu Dhabi guidelines emphasizes the need to contribute more to community activities and ensure reduction is common risk factors contributing to disease development by ensuring effective environment management and waste disposal at the hospitals. At the moment, efforts meant to enhance community wellbeing have been less successful considering few investments in community education program on disease management and emergency care.

More outcomes can be realized if health care sectors were more socially responsible for providing community service in providing preventive, educational, and screening services and programs. As such, the mandate is to ensure that every hospital in Abu Dhabi focuses on addressing the social and health care needs of the community around them, outside their routine mandate and official operations in the clinical settings. In addition to providing health services and information, Abu Dhabi health facilities at their settings or through satellite locations should

take these activities into local communities where patients work and live. Effective SR can be implemented by collaborating with various support groups, educational programs, training sessions, and different community-based activities and resources, and also collaborating with government entities and non-governmental organizations (8). The health facilities should also expand their mission to meet the growing needs of Abu Dhabi residents through effective leadership training to improve the wellbeing of the community under consideration.

### **Changing Internal Operations to Improve SR Implementation**

Considering the numerous areas that the health facilities need to address to improve SR services to the local society of Abu Dhabi, more results can be achieved through effective environmental protection and customer focus. Benomran (7), reported that hospitals should take initiatives to protect their natural environment and to ensure that SR practices could be effectively realized. For example, hospitals should ensure a reduction in paper consumption through improved technological recording and store of data (1). Also, safe waste disposal, efficient utilization of water, and reduced energy utilization ensures hospitals have reserve resources that they can use to address resources to the local communities. Initiatives that contribute to cost reductions and protect the environment, such as reduced emission of greenhouse and carbon dioxide contributes to sustainable surrounding communities where the health facilities operate (10). These ethical practices and obligations further improve the well-being of the local populations with guaranteed reputation to the organization and increases consumer and stakeholder support for their operations.

While examining customer support, research by Rettab (2) documents that a significant number of hospitals in Abu Dhabi are well engaged in meeting regular customer demands. In elaboration, most hospitals in Abu Dhabi focus more on consumer related SR more than any other forms of SR activities. Up to 83% of the surveyed healthcare facilities indicated that they actively engaged in ethical practice to ensure the protection of patient data, customer privacy, regularly assessed consumer satisfaction and provided regular aftercare services. Besides, all the care facilities reported the need to undertake thorough diagnosis and prescriptions when dealing with patient safety and health. Other facilities also ensure their products are well labeled for ease of use (9). However, the type of SR care in clinical settings appear to be different from the SR practice in the communities that appear less thorough and lack the comprehensive assessment found in hospitals. As a result, there might be enablers and hindrances that facilitate SR practice in Abu Dhabi, which needs to be considered by care facilities to ensure optimal SR services to surrounding communities.

#### **Drivers and Barriers of SR Activities in Abu Dhabi**

A combination of factors has recently facilitated SR practice in Abu Dhabi. The most critical driver of SR prac-



tice has been the need to improve customer loyalty and establish an organizational reputation. In addition, the desire to enhance cost-savings, preserves the environment, and reduces resource expenditures, have also catalyzed the need to engage in SR activities (3). Scholars have also emphasized the need for an organizational change of reputation to be a key contributing factor in SR practice to change the image of the health facilities to the public. Other organizations also practice SR to ensure the sustainable relationship with the government, while others practice social services believing their productivity will increase while building employee loyalty (3). Lastly, organizations also reported engaging in SR activities to meet and comply with Islamic values of helping the needy and less privileged in the society.

Despite the several motivations to engage in the SR activities around Abu Dhabi communities, there are some barriers that limit SR practices. Benomran (10) reveals a lack of knowledge to be a major impediment in SR implementation by most care facilities. Another problem is a lack of adequate knowledge on areas that need SR activities around Abu Dhabi. Also, some facilities are unable to accommodate the SR functions in their organizational functions. These three limitations are also followed by various challenges that each hospital facility may face, including inadequate resources, and the high cost of undertaking SR projects (2,5). Some other less prominent hurdles also exist in barring SR implementation including lack of government financing to engage in community services, the invisibility of SR results, lack of commitment from top management, and lack of adequate time and personnel to engage in SR activities. Lastly, employee resistance may also be present but often at negligible levels at resisting SR implementation in Abu Dhabi.

### Conclusion

The current study made a contrast in the current SR practice by Abu Dhabi health industry reveals that some hospitals are more active in community service than other facilities. Overall, health organizations are reluctant to engage in SR activities, and the major problem results from a lack of accountability, transparency, and also an increasing problem of being out of touch with the local communities. Importantly, all healthcare sectors have a high-level awareness of SR and the important role it plays towards community development and wellbeing. In light of increased pressure on Abu Dhabi healthcare industry to deliver better care services, managers should remember their organization's obligations to provide adequate cover to all local populations including the persons in the society that cannot afford healthcare cover. By so doing, they will play a central role in supporting the social and health needs of persons suffering chronic conditions which individuals alone are unable to address. In return, these centers will more like, than others not offering SR services, get more customer loyalties and support from the government in promoting their acts of charity. However, the Abu Dhabi health department should also address the current

issues hindering full SR implementation, while encouraging organizations to adopt SR practice as one of their key business strategies in efforts to promote and enhance community growth and welfare.

### Ethical Issues

Not applicable.

### Conflict of Interests

None.

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