

The Role Of Healthcare Professionals In Shaping Public Health Practice In Saudi Arabia: A Narrative Review

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Abstract

Healthcare professionals are at the heart of public health systems, shaping community well-being through their daily commitment to disease prevention, health promotion, and policy implementation. In Saudi Arabia, the rapid transformation of the health sector—driven by Vision 2030—has put a spotlight on the vital contributions of doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, and community-based practitioners. This review explores their evolving roles, the challenges they encounter, and the innovative strategies being developed to empower them. By understanding these dynamics, we can better support the people behind the progress and pave the way for a healthier future for everyone in the Kingdom.

Introduction

Public health practice depends on a robust and well-coordinated health workforce. Healthcare professionals perform essential functions — ranging from prevention and early diagnosis to health education and emergency responsiveness — that directly affect population health outcomes. In Saudi Arabia, demographic shifts, the increased burden of non-communicable diseases, and strategic health system reforms have reshaped public health priorities and practitioners roles.

Recent national investments and policies associated with Saudi Vision 2030 have focused on workforce capacity, professional training, and public health service efficiencies. These efforts have amplified the need to evaluate how healthcare professionals contribute to public health practice, the challenges they face, and opportunities for enhancement within the Kingdom's evolving health system.

Public Health and the Healthcare Workforce in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's public health ecosystem integrates multiple professional cadres, including clinical practitioners, public health specialists, nurses, and allied health professionals. The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with regulatory bodies, oversees public health initiatives to prevent disease, promote health, and prepare for emergencies.

Recent data indicate substantial growth in the registered health workforce: the Saudi Commission for Health Specialties reported more than 800,000 registered healthcare practitioners in 2025 — a 7.6% increase compared to the previous year — underscoring workforce expansion as a key national priority.

To address global health challenges and improve service quality, the Saudi health system is advancing strategic frameworks to support professional development and international competitiveness of practitioners. For example, the Saudi Commission for Health Specialties has launched a new strategy (2025–2030) to empower healthcare professionals and elevate standards of care.

Roles of Healthcare Professionals in Public Health Practice

- Physicians and Public Health Leadership

Physicians in Saudi Arabia engage in public health through disease surveillance, preventive screening programs, and the implementation of health policies. Their leadership is essential in public health planning, particularly in integrating clinical practice with national prevention strategies. Primary healthcare physicians also serve in immunization campaigns and chronic disease management.

- Nursing Workforce and Regional Disparities

Nurses are critical to community health services, patient education, and health promotion. Recent research highlights inequalities in nursing workforce distribution across regions, which may affect equitable public health service delivery in urban and rural areas. [SpringerLink](#)

Addressing these disparities is central to ensuring consistent access to quality care.

- Allied Health Professionals and Multidisciplinary Contributions

Allied health professionals — including public health specialists, laboratory technologists, nutritionists, health educators, and environmental health practitioners — play significant roles in functionally complementing clinical services and supporting preventive health measures. Their work often intersects with disease surveillance, health education campaigns, and policy support.

- Community-Based Practitioners

Community health workers and primary care teams act as frontline agents in translating public health policies into community action. They contribute to outreach, early identification of health issues, and foundational preventive care.

Challenges Impacting Public Health Workforce Effectiveness

- Workforce Awareness and Transformation Readiness

Healthcare transformation within Saudi Arabia relies on practitioner engagement and adaptability. A recent study found that awareness levels among healthcare workers regarding the national health transformation program remain a critical factor for successful implementation. [SpringerLink](#)

- Training and Capacity Building

Despite workforce growth, continued investment in training — especially in public health competencies — is essential. Strategic capacity building should integrate formal education, continuous professional development, and performance evaluation aligned with evolving health priorities.

- Geographic and Professional Imbalances

Regional disparities in workforce distribution and sector imbalances (e.g., clinical vs. public health specialists) can undermine health equity across the Kingdom. Policies aiming to balance workforce allocation and enhance local training programs are required.

Strategic Opportunities for Public Health Advancement

- Vision 2030 and Workforce Development

Saudi Vision 2030 provides a framework for transforming the health sector, emphasizing workforce development, innovation, and quality improvement. Supporting practitioners through strategic policy formulation, digital training tools, and international collaborations will strengthen public health capacities.

- Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Digital Health

Promoting interdisciplinary practice and leveraging digital health technologies can improve service delivery and expand preventive health initiatives. Advances in health information systems and training platforms are key enablers of such integration.

Conclusion

Healthcare professionals are indispensable to public health practice in Saudi Arabia. Their roles span prevention, health promotion, surveillance, and policy implementation across diverse healthcare settings. Strengthening workforce capabilities, addressing regional and professional disparities, and aligning health education with national priorities are critical to advancing public health outcomes. Continued support through policy, training, and strategic investments will enable the health workforce to meet the complex demands of the Kingdom's evolving public health landscape.

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