

RAZA SIDDIQUI

CEO, Arabian Healthcare Group LLC,

Member of Board of Directors, RAK Chamber of Commerce & Industry

Passionate About People's Healthcare

Raza Siddiqui pioneers the concept of premium healthcare with premium hospitality.

He developed a passion for healthcare while working as a young executive with a pharmaceutical company and became possessed with an indomitable will to succeed while helping his mentor Dr Prathap Reddy of Apollo fame pioneer an Indian revolution in private healthcare.

Raza Siddiqui became a celebrity in hospital administration in the 90s for his spectacular success in the launch of Indraprastha Apollo, New Delhi, as the largest corporate hospital in India. The project was featured in over 2000 newspaper articles and over 300 television slots within one year of its launch.

Siddiqui has been in the UAE for over 15 years now, pursuing his ambition of creating his own global niche of premium healthcare with premium hospitality. He is currently the Chief Executive Officer of Arabian Healthcare Group and an honorary member of board of directors in RAK Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

His showpiece projects here include the RAK Hospital, the first of its kind medical institution in the UAE that combines premium healthcare and premium hospitality. RAK Hospital is a joint venture between Arabian Healthcare Group, owned by the Government of Ras Al Khaimah, under the guidance of His Highness Sheikh Saud Bin Saqr Al Qassimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Ras Al Khaimah, and ETA Star Healthcare of Dubai. RAK Hospital aims to provide international quality healthcare with highly qualified medical staff and skilled nursing care by redefining the standards of excellence in patient care with premium hospitality.

The hospital is managed by the Arabian Healthcare Group in association with Sonnenhof Swiss Health, a leading healthcare group from Switzerland, which draws upon the rich Swiss heritage of healthcare and hospitality and carries a distinct brand in the global medical scene. Sonnenhof has received top rankings from WHO for the quality and reliability of its services. It also ranks at the top in aspects like life expectancy, access and responsiveness and fairness in financial contribution. The hospital achieved a remarkable feat, winning two international accreditations within one year of launch: the Joint Commission International Accreditation and Swiss Leading Hospitals Accreditation.

“We are driven by Swiss hospitality values, have American standards of accreditation and offer rates at par with Asia – and we are located in the Arab world; can it get any better,” asks Siddiqui.

Siddiqui was also instrumental in the setting up of the RAK College of Medical Sciences, a network of clinics and clinical referral laboratories along with the establishment of a medical equipment trading division. He was solely responsible for the planning, execution and management of these projects, the success of which is a prime example of his skill and passion.

He had first come to the UAE while working as Director, International Operations, for the well-known Apollo Hospitals Group of India, for setting up an advanced care multi-specialty hospital in Dubai, which was

conceptualized, planned and launched under his leadership. In that role he also worked with the Joint Commission International for the accreditation of the hospital and established strong rapport and liaison with various Rulers' Offices and also with the Ministries of Health in the UAE and the Middle East, connections which were to become prime factors in his future plans.

His brilliant track record in hospital administration and management may be traced back to the prestigious assignments he undertook in various related capacities in India. Working under the guidance of Dr Pathap Reddy, Chairman of the Apollo Hospital Group, Siddiqui helped develop Apollo as the largest corporate hospitals group in Asia within a record period of one-and-a-half years. He also helped establish a diverse network of physicians and general practitioners as a referral base across India and launched the concept of satellite clinics as feeders and promoted corporate health as a package to corporates for the first time. He was instrumental in making the hospital financially viable in the first year of operations – recognized as a world record of sorts.

He is also a passionate promoter of medical tourism. During his stint with Apollo, he was responsible for promoting India as a healthcare destination, the first time ever that this activity was pursued with a professional approach. For the first time, he arranged for the treatment of more than 100 patients in a year from the UAE in India.

Siddiqui feels that the UAE in its turn has a huge potential for developing into a medical tourism destination. The RAK Hospital itself has played a pioneering role in this respect, attracting significant numbers of medical tourists from Middle East, Africa and the CIS countries, who seek to benefit from the hospital's premium healthcare facilities combining it with a rewarding holiday in the northern emirate.

“In the past, the Middle East had been a major target market for the European and the US healthcare industry and many consultants and hospitals managed to successfully convince people from this region to travel to the US and Europe for treatment. But now, with the standards of healthcare in the Middle East going up, JCI accredited hospitals, top notch facilities and the hiring of doctors with the right credentials, this sector is fast emerging and has all the potential for pulling medical tourists here,” he says.

According to him, one of the Middle East's biggest advantages is that it has a thriving hospitality industry that complements the medical tourism industry. Some of its disadvantages - not being known as a healthcare hub, are being rapidly overcome as several hospitals in the region are courting US accreditations to enhance credibility and tell the world that they too are world class. “Accreditation is coming into vogue as the international traveler is familiar with UK and US names,” he points out.

Siddiqui explains how the emirate of Ras Al Khaimah is unique in the UAE. Its biggest advantage is its uncorrupted landscape – it has a great combination of mountains, seas and deserts and is peppered with date plantations and green patches due to its regular rainfall. RAK's strategic location makes it ideal for tourists from the Middle East, Yemen, Oman, East and West Africa.

“We are promoting RAK Hospital in the African continent and the CIS countries. We are in constant touch with the Ministry of Health in these countries through the embassies and engage with insurance companies, local hospitals and general practitioners. We have realized that RAK has the potential and credits to pull tourists from all over the world,” he says,

“Medical tourists look for quality care as well as convenience. The visas, greeting services at the airport, a good hotel with great F & B options, hospital pick up and drop services, providing for the patient's family and quality care for the patient's needs: these are the important factors. And once the medical requirements are met, we put the patient on a plane safely and keep him connected to the hospital,” says Siddiqui.

With Asian countries being strong contenders for medical tourism – what are the advantages of RAK as a medical tourist destination? “Our rates are quite affordable. We offer nearly the same price as Asia,” he avers.

Siddiqui is, of course, not unmindful of the higher cost of premium healthcare. “Providing premium healthcare involves a great challenge in that the quality has to be improved constantly while at the same time controlling the expenses,” he says.

He feels that the solution is not in saying no to premium healthcare, but in making it accessible to more sections of the society. “It is high time that society focuses on making premium healthcare more accessible. This can be done, as in the US, through mandatory medical insurance. Insurance serves an effective accessibility bridge. Thankfully, the UAE has initiated steps in this direction. Its move to make medical insurance compulsory is beneficial to the well-being of the nation and its people,” he says.

Siddiqui’s obsession for combining healthcare and premium lifestyle has not kept him confined to hospitals. He was actively involved with the development of ETA’s Dubai Lifestyle City, the Dh2.5 billion unique lifestyle project in Dubailand.

Siddiqui finds it extremely gratifying that his prescription for the success of healthcare is being taken very seriously in the UAE.