

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63085/mejsp/856413>

Enhancing Saudi Health Centers by Integrating Paramedics with the Health Safety Team

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Published on: 6 September 2025



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* Introduction

The health sector is one of the important sectors that reflect the extent of the country's progress; and because of the specificity of this sector, staff are required to be very responsible in providing appropriate health services considering some of the challenges they encounter. This made the state see the need to establish health centers that are suitable for receiving emergency cases and given the importance of these centers in saving many lives, this requires the availability of services that contribute to the provision of rapid and effective care before transferring such emergency cases to hospitals.

Due to the spread of many chronic diseases and epidemics, and the difficulty of transporting some

patients to hospitals, health centers have an effective role in providing health services within the available capabilities to provide safety as much as possible until the case is transferred to nearby hospitals. Thus, these centers would provide quick services and reduce time in dealing with the disease.

Ashour (2021) stated that health centers are of vital importance because of the kind of services they provide to individuals; accordingly, these centers are supposed to be supported by all means that would preserve the health of the beneficiaries of their services, in light of the health care given by the government of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, which aims at achieving the goals of the Kingdom's Vision (2030) to improve the services

provided to citizens and residents in the Kingdom. This has been given great attention through the establishment of primary healthcare centers and preventive services that are supposed to be highly effective (Al-Shahri, 2021).

The focus on the transformation of the health sector comes to enhance the human dimension and emphasizes the continuity of its approach in the future, to develop the health system in general and raise the level of services provided, because it is one of the important programs of the Kingdom's Vision (2030). The program has indicated that there are many challenges faced by the health sector, including the weak level of integration between primary and specialized health care, which needs to be restructured, and enhance operational efficiency (Health Sector Transformation Program, 2030).

The Kingdom seeks to raise the level of health through the development of infrastructure, the establishment of hospitals and health centers, and the training of specialists in all areas to reach the achievement of development plans that are in line with the Kingdom's Vision (2030), which would improve the nature of the services provided to individuals by the health system reflected in

medical manpower and administrative services (Al-Otaibi Al-Mutairi Al-Ghannam Al-Qarni and Qaid, 2022).

Abu Hasira (2016) stated that achieving the objectives of primary health centers requires the presence of administrative and medical staff that contribute to the process of cooperation to provide services to patients that leads to achieving the purpose of these centers through the tasks required of the paramedics in providing advanced aid to patients, working to stabilize cases, communicating with medical specialists to report the details of the case of the patient and ensure the readiness of the receiving facility. At the same time, the health safety team is required to provide the appropriate environment that enables paramedics to provide services to others easily, which indicates the cooperative role played by paramedics and the health safety team in health centers to provide effective and efficient services to the patient.

Safety standards are the cornerstone of health care centers as they are the place that is intended for healing and the place that is supposed to be at a high level of security, safety, and health. Thus, managers of hospitals, medical centers, and laboratories must improve the quality

of performance and the quality and safety of services provided to patients. That is why the health safety team is responsible for conducting the safety measures provided by the management, doctors, nurses, and technicians to patients to improve results through the precautionary measures taken.

*** Study Problem**

Health centers spread throughout the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia represent an integral part of hospitals, and they were established with the aim of providing advanced ambulance services to individuals, especially in some remote areas. They are supposed to be at a high level of readiness and efficiency, and that those in charge of them are of high responsibility. Al-Shehri (2021) showed that there are some deficiencies in the performance of these centers, especially the failure to meet the emergency needs of the patient (Health, 2018).

Abdul Sattar's (2017) study showed that health services provided to individuals by health sectors must be characterized by efficiency and high skill. And that the health sector, in all its elements, must provide high-quality services to individuals effectively and efficiently (Saif et al., 2014). Hence, the problem of the study is to identify the following

question: What is the degree of enhancing Saudi health centers by integrating paramedics with the health safety team?

*** Study Objectives**

1- Identifying the extent to which Saudi health centers are enhanced by integrating paramedics with the health safety team.

2- Developing some recommendations that will raise the efficiency and effectiveness of health centers through the cooperation of paramedics and the health safety team.

*** Study Importance**

The study contributes to: -

1- Providing decision-makers in the health sector with more information about health centers, such as, the level of services provided to individuals.

2- Giving researchers an opportunity to conduct more studies on health centers about the efficiency and effectiveness of the provided services.

3- Providing decision-makers in the health sector and the National Center for Crisis and Health Disasters Management on the readiness with more information about health centers' readiness to receive cases and provide the adequate care.

*** Study Terminology**

1- Paramedic: It is a person who diagnoses various medical emergencies and provides appropriate care at the scene of the accident, during the transportation phase, and within hospitals and health centers. The specialized medical paramedic must be scientifically and practically qualified to provide advanced and emergency care for various medical conditions, whether these cases are caused by injury or disease. This is to preserve the lives of patients and prevent complications.

2- Health Centers: Health centers are part of a network of clinics staffed by a group of general practitioners, nurses, and paramedics to provide advanced healthcare and first aid services to residents of a particular area. The services provided are usually emergency, family medicine, and dental care, but some clinics have expanded to include internal medicine, pediatrics, women's care, family planning, pharmacy, optometry, laboratories, and so forth.

3- Health Safety: Abu Shama (1999) defines it as the administrative activities and procedures for protecting workers from the risks resulting from the work performed at the clinics that may lead to their illness and/or accidents.

*** Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies**

This section sheds light on three basic elements: health centers, paramedics, and the health safety team, in addition to listing some previous studies.

1- Health Centers: Health centers represent an important checkpoint during the health services provided by the State to individuals, and due to the spread of the population in large areas away from the main centers, where the establishment of a hospital in each region is unreachable, the State has worked to establish health centers that play an important role in treating some emergency cases.

Health centers are centers that provide advanced medical services and first aid, and sometimes there are some specialties within a specific program throughout the week, but at the same time there are often pathological or critical cases that require immediate procedures that do not have time to reach the hospital, and here lies the vital role of paramedics to deal with such cases. The behavior that occurs during some accidents like the gatherings may hinder the work of paramedics, and here comes the role of the health safety team. (Khazaal, 2018).

In this case, the health safety team works to provide the

appropriate environment and deal with the public appropriately to allow paramedics to work in a safe and appropriate environment with sick cases.

*** The Concept of Health Centers**

Many researchers have dealt with the concept of health centers: -

The Palestinian Ministry of Health (2015) defined health centers as: "the health unit that operates in the area in which it is located and aims to improve the health of the local community by providing services to a group of residents according to specific standards."

Al-Rawashdeh and Al-Samadi (2010) defined health centers as all health services provided for the prevention and treatment of serious emergency injuries. They defined it as health centers that are established in residential neighborhoods and remote areas and aim to provide primary health care to preserve the lives of individuals and provide advanced aid that contributes to saving their lives from some dangers that may have a negative impact in the absence of rapid medical intervention.

*** The Importance of Health Centers**

Health centers are centers affiliated with the Ministry of Health and are called in some countries the

first health center, and they represent a point in providing health services in remote areas or areas characterized by high population density and are far from benefiting from health services in hospitals. Some individuals work at these centers to contribute to the provision of emergency medical services until the patient reaches the nearest hospital.

Therefore, one of the reasons for the success of health centers in performing tasks is the solidarity and cooperation of all workers in health centers, whether health safety staff or paramedics. Creativity and cooperation would contribute to preserving the lives of individuals and increasing the efficiency of health centers. (Jena Abadi & Javan, 2014)

Health services play an important role in the lives of individuals and make them feel the extent of responsibility towards them by the State, and many researchers in the field of health care have stated that health centers represent an important element. That was mentioned by Al-Bakri (2005) and Hassan (2008), which is expected to contribute to: -

1- Achieving the benefit of individuals, and this requires the ability to deal with emergencies with primary and secondary staff.

2- Services must be of high quality because these services cannot be postponed due to their direct connection to the health and lives of individuals.

3- Ability to balance the roles of workers in health centers.

Therefore, health centers represent the primary health care, which is the key element in lessening pressure on the public health system because they provide health and safety for all (Al-Shorafat, 2008).

Health service has become an important role in the life of society and contributes to its well-being and stability, and recent years have witnessed a great development in the field of providing these services, as governments have paid attention to supervising and controlling the quality of health services because of their effective impact on the well-being of the individual and society. Health services are characterized by a set of characteristics that make them distinctive and different from services related to goods, as the service received by the beneficiary must meet the needs and requirements (Khazaal, 2018). Therefore, the center must be responsible towards individuals, and they are expected to be a temporary replacement for permanent health services (Sufyan, 2008).

*** Tasks of Health Centers**

The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed guidelines for the establishment of primary healthcare centers, which are expected to carry out many tasks. Khazaal (2018), and Abdul Razzaq and Hammoud (2018) have clarified them: -

- 1- Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of health care facilities.
- 2- Developing a strategy to best balance public-private partnerships.
- 3- Practicing Family Medicine.
- 4- Conducting medical triage.
- 5- Supporting referral systems.
- 6- Developing the capacity of service providers in the health care sector.
- 7- Selecting the right technology.
- 8- Selecting and providing quality medicines.

Thus, the tasks of health centers are essentially providing emergency services as quickly as possible until the patient or injured is safely transported to the nearest hospital, whether in terms of treatment and providing advanced aid or through follow-up of sick cases until they reach hospitals for permanent treatment. That is why, for some remote areas, these centers represent the key and the main element in treating emergency cases that face difficulty in reaching the hospital for one reason or another.

*** Health Centers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia paid much attention to the health sector since its early days. The founding King, Abdul Aziz Al Saud, sought to develop this sector through cooperation with international health institutions and the use of qualified staff from various specialties, where he put the first touches on the establishment of hospitals and health centers all over the Kingdom.

Health care services are provided to more than 31 million citizens and residents, in addition to millions of visitors during Hajj and Umrah periods, through the health facilities system that includes medical cities, specialized, university, and military hospitals, and primary care centers (Al-Shehri, 2021).

The efforts made by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the medical sector led to the development of this sector through the establishment of hospitals and health centers, which spread throughout the Kingdom and now cover large population centers. The working hours of these centers are divided into full-time and extended hours, which amount to about sixteen hours a day, while the shift centers operate

twenty-four hours a day (Mohammed, 2023).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has taken great steps in modernizing and developing the health sector and the huge spread of health centers is evidence of the Kingdom's interest in the human element and the provision of the best means that raise the level of health services provided. However, these centers need further development by providing specialized medical staff and supporting workers by providing safety and public health teams that have a major role in maintaining security and stability.

2- Paramedics: The services provided by health centers are a temporary alternative to the services provided by hospitals; the main role of paramedics in these health centers is to provide quick and emergency services to the patient. To save the patient's life, the paramedic takes some steps that are represented in rapid intervention based on the paramedic's knowledge of the patient's condition until conducting medical intervention and advanced aid.

Paramedic services represent access to emergency medical care for patients suffering from illnesses or injuries, and the paramedic provides the necessary emergency medical

care to save the patient's life, as ambulance services are linked to cases of various diseases and injuries to life-threatening conditions (Al-Qahtani, 2019).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has established the Saudi Red Crescent Society to carry out ambulance services in the process of treating and rescuing the injured person and transporting them to the nearest medical point with the aim of maintaining a kind of medical stability through advanced aid (Al-Harbi and Al-Daghiri, 2021). The paramedic faces many problems and difficulties due to the increased number of cases, especially during religious seasons, as they are the first responder in dealing with sick cases before being transferred to hospitals, where they face many difficulties, pressures and anxiety, perhaps through long hours and dealing with some injuries that may leave negative effects on their lives in the long term (Aqili et al., 2022).

Basic services indicate the ability to provide initial treatment procedures skillfully and effectively to an injured person when an accident or sudden illness occurs, which is the skill of saving the lives of the injured, and preventing the development of risks and deterioration of their condition, which is a basic, specific

and temporary role, as advanced aid is essential because it is concerned with providing primary treatment procedures within the available capabilities.

*** The Duties of the Paramedics and their Role in Providing Care Services**

- 1- Saving the patient's life from a certain danger.
- 2- Airway control: with advanced methods, including tracheal intubation and airway surgery, which includes tracheal intubation and tracheal surgery.
- 3- Dealing with fainting situations.
- 4- Advanced Cardiac Support: providing Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS) that includes treatment of heart injury and cardiac arrest.
- 5- Control bleeding.
- 6- Management of spinal injuries, which includes safe transportation.
- 7- Fracture control.
- 8- Obstetrics
- 9- Skin burns control.
- 10- Triage of patients in case of mass injuries
- 11- Assess and assess the safety of general accident sites.
- 12- Skills in preparing and submitting oral and written reports.
- 13- Operating vehicles in emergencies and ensuring their readiness.

14- Routine radio operation procedures for communication with the concerned authorities and medical guidance.

15- Giving emergency and necessary medications.

It is noted that paramedics have a major role in preserving the lives of the injured, and that they seek to provide the best services within the available capabilities in some accidents that come to health centers. However, some cases may lead to the anger of the relatives of the injured, and, in such cases, paramedics are threatened. The gathering of the public around some incidents leads to obstruction of the efforts of paramedics in providing the best services, which is a major obstacle at times, and the return is negative on the lives of some of the injured, and here lies the importance of the presence of the health safety team.

3- Health Safety Team: The health safety team plays a key role in providing security through which employees can perform their tasks effectively.

Al-Qaryouti (2010) showed that providing a work environment with a health safety team would contribute to mitigating the risks that lead to harm to workers during the performance of their duties. Damage does not affect the physical work

environment only but extends to the feelings of workers within the work environment.

The team aims at providing protection and prevention from any events that may affect workers during the performance of the required tasks, through effective management in providing information to workers, which must be known to avoid any dangers as much as possible (Moussa, 2018).

Daas (2019) stated that health and safety measures are the procedures carried out by the organization with the aim of protecting employees and reducing any risks while providing a professional atmosphere that contributes to enhancing the level of performance.

The importance of providing health safety has increased, as the Occupational Safety and Health Convention was concluded in 1981, which aims to prevent accidents caused by work, familiarize workers with safety rules, and achieve the greatest possible health to reduce the level of loss and damage to workers.

Aallali (2004) defined occupational health safety as a part of a system within the work environment that reduces the source of risk of any kind in order to enable workers to carry out their duty.

Abbas (2003) defined occupational health safety as administrative activities and procedures to protect employees from the risks resulting from the work performed in the workplace that may lead to their illness and/or accidents.

Al-Habil and Ayesh (2012) defined occupational health safety as the organizational and practical efforts and the material and human capabilities that are made to control occupational hazards and reduce the occurrence of accidents as much as possible in order to preserve the three elements of production: man, machine, and material.

*** Objectives of Occupational Safety and Health**

Achieving safety through safeguarding individuals' lives in institutions and work and avoiding risks that would affect their safety in the work environment. This would disrupt work and waste time.

The safety team is an essential element in helping paramedics to carry out their duties and provide the appropriate environment required. That is why health safety is a prerequisite in institutions, especially after many medical staff were attacked by some patients' relatives. Thus, the health and safety conditions vary from one country to another;

accordingly, the objectives of health safety (Heikal, 2003) are: -

- 1- Protecting staff from all dangers that may occur in the work environment.
- 2- Providing a safe work environment for workers in all health centers.
- 3- Protecting staff from work accidents that would create a large gap during their absence.
- 4- Reducing the financial expenses spent on individuals because of a work injury.
- 5- Creating awareness of health requirements that would provide safe job performance and raise the morale of workers to increase their performance.
- 6- Improving the work environment in all conditions that would improve the performance of employees.
- 7- Establishing security and safety systems that would be contributing to reducing risks.
- 8- Following up frequently on any dangers that may affect the safety of workers and take quick measures to address them.
- 9- Providing public safety equipment in the internal environment of institutions.
- 10- Training workers on how to deal with the public during accidents.
- 11- Reviewing occupational safety and health legislation, securing and modernizing the work environment,

and taking effective procedures and arrangements for its implementation.

12- Strengthening and developing organizational and administrative structures and institutions concerned with occupational safety and health and securing the work environment in accordance with the latest standards and requirements.

*** The Importance of Occupational Safety and Health**

- 1- Reducing labor costs, because an organization that is aware of the level of health safety would contribute to the institution avoiding many material costs.
- 2- Providing a healthy work environment with low risks by reducing the risks leading to harm to workers.
- 3- Strengthening the relationship between employees of different departments.

*** Previous Studies**

The following is a presentation of some previous studies that dealt with health centers and services, paramedics, and the health safety team: -

Al-Shehri (2021): The research aimed to shed light on the extent of satisfaction of patients with the health services provided in primary health care centers in Riyadh in terms of features, services, and locations of the centers, in addition to the health

service provided, manpower and electronic services. Since the research community was primary health care centers in Riyadh, the study sample consisted of 200 random references from four centers of different locations according to the most appropriate geographical distribution. The samples were collected according to the distribution of random electronic questionnaires to the patients of these centers. In order to achieve the goals, the descriptive analytical approach was used, which is done by describing the extent of satisfaction, analyzing it and identifying the components of the characteristics of the center's patients.

The research stated several results, the most important of which is the majority of patients for the centers from the category of women in addition to the presence of deficiencies in the availability of medicines, deficiencies in providing high-quality service, and lack of development and training of workers, especially receptionists. Based on the researcher's findings, he recommended the importance of developing government buildings in addition to raising the efficiency of the workforce and training them, and working to eliminate shortages,

especially in medicines and other support services.

Ashour (2021) conducted a study aimed at identifying the extent of the application of organizational health in health centers, by identifying the concept, objectives, and importance, and its relationship to demographic variables (gender, age, educational level, job title, number of years of experience). Based on the research literature, previous studies, and expert consultation, a questionnaire was built to collect data that included (36) items distributed into eleven areas (clarity of purpose, confidence, morale, adaptation, harnessing resources, balance of power, cohesion, appropriateness of communication, creativity, problem-solving, and independence), distributed to a sample of (35) workers in health centers in the year 2020/2021. The study population included (86) nurses, doctors, administrators, and support services. The results of the study showed that the responses of the members of the study sample towards the extent to which the dimensions of organizational health are applied in health centers, as perceived by workers in those centers, were very high, and here it is clear to the researcher through the high total

score that the health centers surveyed apply the dimensions of organizational health to a high degree, and the reason for this is the availability of capabilities in the health centers surveyed, and that there is a need to increase the focus of the management of those centers in creating a healthy organizational environment by increasing the degree of independence of the institution and the employee and developing dealing with problem-solving by following scientific foundations and a follow-up system for evaluation due to the degree of response to the dimensions of problem-solving and independence.

In a study carried out by Al-Qahtani (2019) aimed to identify the satisfaction of beneficiaries of primary health care centers with the quality of health services, a field study in the city of Riyadh, using the social survey methodology was conducted. The study tool was a questionnaire to collect information, and it was applied to a sample of the beneficiaries of the services of primary health care centers in Riyadh, (225) centers. The study found that the sample members of the beneficiaries of primary health care centers are satisfied with the quality of services provided to them in primary health care centers with a

degree of (satisfied) in general. The study recommended the need to pay attention to workers in primary health care centers and provide a stimulating and supportive environment for serious work to push them to achieve satisfactory and high-quality services and achieve positive communication with the beneficiaries of the center's services.

*** Studies of Paramedics**

In a study carried out by Al-Aqili et al. (2022), they aimed to identify the problems facing paramedics at the Saudi Red Crescent Authority. The study sample consisted of (91) paramedics from the Saudi Red Crescent Authority, and the study used the descriptive approach, where the level of problems facing paramedics was at an average level, especially in financial, administrative, technical, and social problems.

The Jabour study (2019) aimed to identify the attitudes of citizens towards the efficiency of workers in Jordanian government hospitals. The study population consisted of (198) patients and the study used the descriptive analytical approach. The study found that there is much violence practiced on hospital staff, namely verbal violence, physical violence, and violence against hospital property.

A study carried out by (Bigham et al., 2014) aimed to describe the violence experienced by paramedics at the ambulance site in Canada and the procedures that paramedics interacted with. The study community consisted of paramedics in rural areas and urban suburbs in two Canadian provinces and a sample of (1676) paramedics. The study used the descriptive approach. This study has reached many results, the most important of which: the majority of Canadian paramedics surveyed have been subjected to verbal violence and physical assault, and the families of the injured are carrying out these assaults.

*** Studies of Occupational Safety and Health**

The study by Hassouna (2005) aimed to examine the current safety laws in terms of their application and suitability to the environment and the problems associated with the enforcement of laws at construction sites. The study also focused on the approach of owners, consultants, insurance companies, and contracting companies towards safety in engineering projects and aimed to determine the role of the authorities to apply safety systems in engineering projects. Information was collected from contractors,

owners, and consultants, where the sample size reached (110) people. The results of the study showed that there is awareness by contractors, owners, and consultants of the importance of safety in engineering projects; however, not enough efforts are being made to achieve safety goals in construction projects.

Al-Khatib (2005) aimed to shed light on the reality of occupational safety for cleaners in Palestinian hospitals and its relationship to the reality of dealing with medical waste in these hospitals. One of the most important findings of the study was that the level of occupational safety of cleaners is substandard, as most do not have personal protective equipment, and that more than 40% of them have been exposed to acupuncture while dealing with medical waste. It was noted that there was no specific policy for vaccinating cleaners to protect them from communicable diseases, nor were medical examinations carried out before or during employment. Only 37.2% of cleaners reported that they received training on how to deal with medical waste, and that 23.2% work 15 hours or more a day. It was also noted that there is no job stability for cleaners in their work, as it was found that 55.8% of cleaners have only spent one year

or less working in the hospital, as well as a lack of great interest for officials in the occupational safety of workers and achieving their satisfaction, and there is a significant lack of infrastructure for dealing with medical waste.

*** Studies of Health Centers**

Al-Shehri's study (2021) tried to highlight the extent of patients' satisfaction with the health services provided in primary health care centers in Riyadh in terms of features, services, and location of the centers, in addition to the health service provided, manpower, and electronic services. Ashour (2021) identified the extent of the application of organizational health in health centers by identifying the concept, objectives, and importance.

The study of the Quality Planning Department at the Palestinian Ministry of Health (2015) tried to evaluate the quality of services in primary healthcare centers in the Northern governorates from the point of view of patients and medical staff.

*** Study Recommendations**

1- Through the presentation of previous studies, it is noted that there is no direct study that tried to integrate the health safety team and paramedics, and it is noted through the presentation of studies that there

is a direct and significant relationship between the health safety team and paramedics, and we recommend to the concerned authorities the need to strengthen health centers with paramedics and integrate them with workers in the field of health safety, which would deal with various risks and injuries, and this empowerment of paramedics would contribute to creating a positive atmosphere on the lives of the injured, especially that health centers are spread in areas close to patients and injured, unlike hospitals, and this requires the presence of paramedics with high density inside health centers.

2- Remote areas are mainly devoid of services, so the establishment of health centers in these areas and neighborhoods is evidence of the great interest in the lives of individuals and the importance of providing services as quickly as possible in the event of some accidents and injuries, and the cooperation between the health safety team and paramedics contributes to creating a key role in providing services efficiently and effectively.

3- The specialization of emergency medical services is poorly present in the Ministry of Health in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and is negligible, and the role of the paramedic has not been activated in

an organized medical and healthy manner, but their work in hospitals has been limited to ambulance transport. These jobs are done by nurses and doctors, and if health centers and hospitals are supported by paramedics in the emergency department, and the role of the paramedic is activated correctly, this will contribute to supporting nurses due to the shortage that the state suffers from.

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