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Kingdom Seeking 13,000 Family Doctors

P.K. Abdul Ghafour, Arab News —

JEDDAH, 1 July 2007 — Saudi Arabia is seeking 13,000 family doctors to work at its primary health centers, according to Dr. Obaid ibn Sulaiman Al-Obaid, deputy health minister for planning and development.

“We have already signed contracts with Egyptian authorities to recruit 4,000 family doctors... It will take time to supply the adequate number of family doctors required by health centers across the country,” he said.

The family and community health system is being introduced into the Kingdom for the first time. The Kingdom is planning to have 2,000 health centers within the next three years. The minister also disclosed plans to hold a nationwide campaign to enlighten the public about the need for family medicine. Many people are not aware of the benefits of family doctors and their duties.

The ministry decided to introduce the system as part of its efforts to combat chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart ailments as well as nutrition problems.

Under the program, each Saudi family in the Kingdom will be assigned a special doctor in a primary health center. The ratio of family doctors per family in other countries is between 1: 1,500 and 1: 2,000.

“Currently in the Kingdom, the ratio is 1: 4,000, but we intend to bring it down to 1: 400,” said Al-Obaid, adding, “The program will focus on increasing the number of current primary health care centers and increasing the majors in family medicine.”

Physicians specializing in nutrition, psychology and counseling will also be made available in the new primary health centers. The ministry also has plans to send Saudis to Arab countries such as Egypt, Sudan and Tunisia to study family medicine for one year. The ministry has appointed 12 committees to study the implementation of the new primary health care plan.

“Family medicine is one of the rare specializations in the world as many people do not know its importance... But in advanced countries, these doctors are considered the corner stone of family life,” the minister said.

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