Healthcare System in Iraq with Telemedicine

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Abstract: The healthcare system in Iraq has undergone many changes due to a high level of instability on its political and social front. The sector has suffered from a substantial development hindrance on the basis of reduced public health funding at the time before 2003. At that time, the healthcare professionals including doctors were compensated minimally and healthcare organizations were in a terrible state of affairs. In this paper we examine the healthcare system in Iraq

Keywords: healthcare system, Iraq, public health funding, healthcare organizations

1. Introduction

Beginning 2004, some developments in Iraq's healthcare sector started. Multiple hospitals and healthcare centers were set up through funding obtained from foreign countries [1]–[4]. This phase in the country's history led to enhancement of healthcare facilities in the region. From the time since healthcare situation in Iraq has gained international concerns, a lot has changed for the better.

Some of the reforms in Iraq's healthcare sector include training of medical professionals in the region. The country lacked experienced professionals in healthcare for a long time[1]–[8]. This dearth of medical professionals emerged in the year 2004, and with key reforms in place, the situation has improved.

In the 1970s, Iraq had a centralized free healthcare system in place. A substantial part of country's urban and rural population took benefit of this system by gaining free access to healthcare services in the region. However, due to various political developments, the healthcare facilities suffered from a major blow.

Iraq's healthcare situation demands urgent attention. There are thousands of victims of war and violence that seek critical treatment. There are times when there are too many patients demanding urgent attention, but too little medical professionals to handle them. The injuries sustained due to bomb blasts demand special care and attention, and the country still lacks complex health support systems to cater to such cases [9].

As per reports published by the United Nations, there are many medical professionals in Iraq who have left the
nation for safer residence in various parts of the world. This has resulted in the availability of limited skilled medical doctors in the country. There is an urgent need to push trained and efficient medical professionals in the region in order to manage violence struck cases[10]–[13].

A lot of patients in Iraq are eagerly waiting for their chance to undergo complex surgical procedures. Some of these are fortunate enough to get timely help, many others have to wait for a long time before they can get some respite [9], [14].

The repercussions of war are seen in the form of an alarming health condition in Iraq. The country needs smart and sophisticated approach to treat thousands of war victims that need medical attention. Many people are suffering from chronic health issues due to war, and some of these need immediate medical assistance [15], [16].

2. Violence in Iraq

There are multiple violence affected regions in the country with deteriorated healthcare systems. There is a huge gap in the availability of skilled medical assistance in the region. US has extended a lot of financial help for enhancing the healthcare facilities in the region over the years. The impact of such initiatives is seen in the form of multiple hospitals and healthcare centers that have emerged in the region [17], [18].

3. The limitation of Iraqi healthcare system

Healthcare system in Iraq has a complex historical chapter. After the end of World War I in the year 1918, a formal healthcare system started in Iraq with the British governance. In the year 1921, the first “Directorate of Public Health Services” or “the Ministry of Health” was set-up and later institutionalized in the year 1959[1]–[8], [14], [19]–[23].

War due to any reason, whether it is declared one or a police action leaves behind a lot of destruction in the region. A place which once flourished with civilization, now appears no more than rubble. Some of the basic needs such as food, water and clothing become a challenge. With a history of more than 13 years of conflict in Iraq, the healthcare system is bound to suffer[24]–[27].

Before the emergence before 2003, Iraq had one of the most modern healthcare systems in the region with well-trained doctors and support staff. But in the late 1990s, Iraqi government reduced the healthcare spending by 90% which had serious impacts such as an increase in maternal mortality by 300% and infant mortality by 100%. The proportion of diabetic and cancer patients also multiplied due to this.

Diseases spread in the region, but the healthcare was ignored. Malnutrition as well as water borne diseases such as
malaria, typhoid, cholera and dysentery were a common event in the region. Tuberculosis and adolescent diseases emerged in high numbers in the Iraqi population.

Doctors were often kidnapped and 120 of them were killed. As a result, nearly 30 thousand medicos left the region. In the twenty first century, Iraq’s healthcare system was in a very bad shape. By the year 2003, war activities had crumbled the country’s key research labs and hospitals. More than 30% of family planning set-ups were devastated. To add to that, sanitary system of the region faced a downfall and led to an increase in water borne diseases. There are no exact stats for death toll, but it was certainly gigantic [27], [28].

4. Rebuilding Iraq

In the year 2004, international community provided the much needed financial help to rebuild healthcare services in the region. As many as 240 hospitals were set up along with 1200 primary health centers. An inflow of medical supplies such as vaccines and medicines combined with improvised sanitation improved the health condition to some extent. Funds were also utilized in medico training at various hospitals[4], [26], [29], [30].

With the fresh attacks, by the year 2005 only 15 hospital beds were left with nearly 6 doctors and 11 nurses for a population of 10,000. The situation further worsened in 2006 with contamination of blood banks with deadly Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) which causes AIDS.

The health establishments on the region were financially insufficient to compensate medical professionals and buy drug supplies. Patients often bribed professionals for medical assistance, thus making healthcare beyond the scope of the poor [9].

5. Iraqi telemedicine Support

Telemedicine is the use of the telecommunications system and Information for delivery to remote health service system on telecommunications infrastructure [1-7]. This helps eliminate the barriers of distance and improve access to medical services that are not always available rural communities. It is clear that the chassis design improves telemedicine medicine practice in developing countries. But the biggest obstacle perceived by health professionals not to adopt telemedicine system was the lack of knowledge about telemedicine and its applications, benefits [4,5,7,12]. To adopt Telemedicine, the most often cited was the lack of barriers sufficient knowledge of the application and other telemedicine services, followed by difficulties the implementation and lack of time to adopt telemedicine [1-3, 6]. The Federal Government of Iraq and the IT department in Iraq play a vital role in promoting telemedicine facilities the country by launching several pilot projects, funding Development of
telemedicine software and key sponsors telemedicine projects.

6. Conclusion

It is natural that with such a drastic state of affairs, healthcare system rejuvenation is going to be an uphill task. With the redundancy of oil for food program, international help is needed to address the issue. An investment of nearly 1.6 billion USD is expected for healthcare system recovery in the region. Besides the difficulties that happenings in Iraqi healthcare system the best solution is to implement the telemedicine project.

References


