EVOLUTION OF A NEW MEDICAL SCHOOL: GOALS AND CHALLENGES

INTRODUCTION
In February 2001, a Royal decree was issued to establish a new medical school in Jazan, the Southern part of Saudi Arabia. Directives were given by the Ministry of Higher Education to King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah to undertake this task. This paper raises some questions on the establishment of this college and attempts to discuss the subject through their answers.

WHY A NEW MEDICAL SCHOOL?
Undoubtedly, Saudi Arabia will need new medical and paramedical graduates for a long time. Estimates of this need, as documented by Sebai, state that judging by the number of Saudis being trained annually only 32% of the Saudi health manpower requirements would have been met by the year 2020.1 Thus, training of Saudi personnel in various health fields is important for the success of the health development plans of the country.

WHY IN JAZAN?
Jazan, a small city in the Southern part of Saudi Arabia, is the capital of Jazan region comprising 13 districts with a total population of approximately 1.5 million. The area is remote and has a middle to low socioeconomic status. Jazan city is only 70 km from the Yemeni border. It is known to be a malaria endemic area and suffered in 1999 from the first reported epidemic of rift valley fever outside the African continent. Health statistics from the area indicate high rates of morbidity, mortality, and low health care coverage compared to other regions in Saudi Arabia.2 Various assessments by health planners revealed that there was an urgent need for health reform in the area and the establishment of a medical educational institute would help to remedy this situation.

WHAT ARE THE EXPECTED BENEFITS TO THE AREA FROM A MEDICAL SCHOOL?
Medical colleges, generally, are meant to produce medical doctors and paramedical personnel. The expected mission of this college in Jazan is to raise the standard of health in this area by producing health personnel who would be involved in community programs to combat health problems, and work with other health agencies in the region in their preventive and curative programs.

WHICH WAY TO GO IN MEDICAL EDUCATION IN THIS COLLEGE?
New medical schools have two main options of medical education. They can adopt the traditional curriculum of basic and clinical sciences or assume the new approaches that integrates both these sciences in body systems using problem-based learning approach (PBL) in low or high doses. Review of the existing literature identifies the following problems with
the traditional curriculum: overcrowding of the curriculum, over presentation of some subjects, the presence of relatively non-relevant subjects, dissociation between basic and clinical sciences, repetition of lectures and exams, the need for new subjects of clinical relevance, predominantly hospital-based medical education with minimal community-based practice, as well as non-optimal use of resources.\textsuperscript{3,4} Planners involved in Jazan Medical College agreed that the new school had to have its unique mission and perspective. The building of innovative curriculum of medical education should be the priority of this college. The educational goals should be to produce doctors who can feel and diagnose the health needs of this area, endeavour to discover the underlying factors of the health problems and work to minimize them through curative and preventive programs. The integration of basic and clinical subjects in the curriculum is thought to build the required relevance in the minds of future doctors. The use of community oriented approach in teaching can introduce the student to the problems of the community and deepen his understanding of the socioeconomic and environmental background of various health matters. Health and disease will be taught hand in hand and in addition to curing diseases and alleviating pain, the maintenance of community health will be an important part of medical education.

**HOW TO GO ABOUT DOING THE JOB?**

Long and short-term strategies could be planned for this mission and the following are some major issues to be tackled. The medical school should investigate and quantify all available physical, educational, social and health resources in the area. A skilful mobilization of these resources in addition to the optimum utilization of university resources will facilitate the achievement of the objectives of the college. An extensive analysis of the available strengths, expected weaknesses, manageable opportunities and true threats (SWAT analysis) is needed. A thorough assessment of the health needs of the area should be conducted.

Undoubtedly, a number of problems will arise in the establishment of the new medical college. Administrative and logistic problems are expected in various processes in a centralized system. These are only a few of the challenges that lie ahead. However, these should not dampen the enthusiasm or weaken the persistence of the educational community in working toward its objectives.

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