As the Ministry of Health announced last week, with the implementation of Wareed, the new health information system in hospitals and clinics in the UAE will be connected via an online network by 2011 to improve patient care and ensure patient safety.

This network aims to exchange and access to medical and health information between patients and doctors as well as healthcare peers across the country. Patients can now be treated in the most effective way by having access to their treatment results, updates and follow-ups. They can also easily be transferred from one hospital to another in the UAE, even outside of the country thanks to specific agreements between the hospitals. The new system promises to stop losing data, saving time and money, decreasing the waiting time for medical appointments but most importantly has the ability to provide international medical opinion.

Although Wareed has a lot of advantages, it has some drawbacks. The main concerns are how to run the system in the most efficient way and ensure patient safety while going through the process of implementing the customer-centric data system.

At the 3rd Annual Healthcare Expansion Congress Mid-East, organized by naseba, e-health applications in the region, the importance of information at the point of care, patient safety and cancer care were among the hottest issues discussed during the event. The leading solution providers, as well as decision makers from the healthcare industry around the globe gathered together to share their experiences and find the best solutions to their needs.

Effectiveness in implementation:

Raj Singh, healthcare solutions consultant EMEA, Hitachi Data Systems stated, "Any successful and effective method of implementing e-Health services for the population of the UAE requires a proper understanding of the actual requirements and objectives of the program. Certainly in today’s world there exists the technical capability to deliver highly effective medical clinical application suites to meet and exceed the service level requirements that may be placed upon them."

The key considerations for such capability should also take into account the medical and clinical characteristics, as well as the specific objectives adopted, with stated objectives for improved care, workflow processes and the efficiency of the health and medical care possible. These ‘healthcare-business-level’ objectives can then be translated to technological solutions, requirements designed and implemented to meet them.

How to ensure patient safety?

Patient safety is and should continue to be the most important consideration for delivering the new system. A certain element of risk from human errors always remains but we should certainly be able to address avoidable and often costly mistakes, noted Raj Singh.

“The reliability of IT health information systems coupled with advances in technologies such as RFID and Finger Vein Biometrics can help improve patient safety significantly. The most important consideration for improving patient safety still relies, however, on the healthcare providers who need to ensure they have the best care practices with correct patient identification throughout their healthcare workflows and processes, he added.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: as a role model:

On the second day of the 3rd Annual Healthcare Expansion Congress Mid-East, Dr. Fahad Bin Saleh Al Ortith, the MD Chief Executive Officer of King Faisal Specialist Hospital & Research Center - Riyadh, shared the experience of e-health application in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is the first country in the Middle East region, to have implemented the eCLIC program, patented by VISECL, which combines e-ICU and Fingerprint Vein Biometrics software and remote monitoring to connect off-site critical care physicians and nurses to ICU patients at all times.

The eCLIC Program provides an alternative way to deliver high-quality critical care when specialist resources are limited. The eCLIC Vision is to have centrally monitored intensivist physicians & critical care nurses - round-the-clock in an eCLIC Center - to help bedside teams watch over their sickest patients and to prioritize treatments. The evidence is growing that eCLIC Programs are having a profound impact on saving lives, reducing complications as well as the length of patient stays, especially in the countries where people have limited and unequal resources in healthcare services.

Implementation of e-Health services ensures the equal distribution to high tertiary care to all citizens of Saudi Arabia, easy accessibility to healthcare services and education through e-health networks, cost effectiveness and efficiency for both the healthcare community by utilizing high sophisticated e-health technology and information, availability of healthcare service, patient safety and treatment of all kind of medical and administrative events to as many as possible, and most attention could be, noted Dr. Fahad Bin Saleh Al Ortith.

His message for UAE health authorities was: "Sharing the requirement by utilizing high sophisticated e-Health applications managing heavy data exchange possible," he added.

The Government's point of view:

"We have abandoned plans to develop a $8m Healthcare City in 100 km outside of Muscat, MEID has reported. The company did not say why the plans for the mixed-use development, which was to have included medical colleges, hotels, and hospitals, were dropped."