

Nation

The 3-day Real Estate Development and Housing Sustainability Symposium will open in Dammam University on Oct. 25 to discuss the performance of the real estate market and housing crisis in the Kingdom.

Forum on Mass Gathering Medicine opens in Jeddah

Kingdom's plan to manage movement of Haj pilgrims praised

MOHAMMED AL-KINANI

JEDDAH: The Minister of Health opened the Global Forum on Mass Gathering Medicine Saturday with a speech on behalf of King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, highlighting the Kingdom's experience in hosting the Haj pilgrimage, a "hugely important event" gathering a "mass of people from over 160 nations".

"We sought to hold this conference, the first of its kind in the world, to discuss mass gathering medicine with specialist organizations bringing lessons from experience not only to pilgrims, but also to all mass gatherings," Abdullah Al-Rabeah said. "It has been made possible with the cooperation of scientists from across the world serving humanity everywhere, regardless of religion, color or race."

The three-day event will hear from some 30 international specialists in the field, with Saudi Arabia's contribution coming in the form of vast experience in the annual pilgrimage.

"The Kingdom's priority is the health of pilgrims, and the Ministry of Health has opened hospitals and health centers of the highest standards to serve the needs of guests during this period," Abdullah Al-Rabeah said.

"For that reason we call upon scientists here to develop a new medical concept that cares for mass gatherings, to be launched from the land of humanity and revelation, Saudi Arabia."

British medical journal and co-



Margaret Chan, director general of the World Health Organization (left) delivers a speech to the audience at the Global Forum on Mass Gathering Medicine in Jeddah Saturday. (Saudi Gazette photo by Badr Al-Asmari and Okaz)



organizer of the event The Lancet, described mass gathering medicine as "complex" and involving "considerable challenges in areas such as water and sanitation management, environmental health, travel medicine and vaccination strategies".

"Among global mass gatherings, the Haj pilgrimage is the largest, most frequent, most diverse, and most well-studied," The Lancet said. "Saudi Arabia has specialist expertise in the management of mass gatherings."

Al-Rabeah said that works in the two holy cities are based on the strictest standards to ward against the threats constituted by gatherings of large numbers of people.

"Such large numbers of pilgrims performing their rituals together at the Holy Mosque or Jamarat Bridge have led us to carry out extensive expansion works to enable Haj and

Umrah pilgrims to perform them with ease," he said.

"The patronage of the King shows the commitment of the leadership to the safety of pilgrims. The Haj season is an example of these large gatherings and Saudi Arabia has had considerable success in the organization of the movement of some two million pilgrims every year. This vast number of people is controlled in a small area, which really makes the Saudi experience an example to follow."

The minister said he was optimistic that the conference would produce recommendations for improvements to health measures related to the medicine of mass gatherings.

"Many international experts and epidemic disease consultants will share their ideas and knowledge of mass gatherings throughout the world, as well as Saudi Arabia's

experience in organizing vast numbers of people during Haj."

Forum participants from abroad include health ministers from the US, Germany, Lebanon, and the Gulf Cooperation Council states, the director general of the World Health Organization, Margaret Chan, and the secretary generals of the Organization of Islamic Conference, the Arab League, GCC and the US-based Center for Disease Control.

The Minister of Culture and Information, Abdul Aziz Khoja, and Fuad Al-Farsy, Minister of Haj, were also in attendance with the minister of health.

"It is truly an honor for Saudi Arabia that this vital conference is being held in Jeddah, in the land of humanity, during the days leading up to the great Haj season," Al-Rabeah said.

— Saudi Gazette

Insurance firms lose SR1.2b a year in health fraud

RIYADH: The Kingdom's medical insurance companies are losing up to SR1.2 billion a year due to fraudulent claims and hospitals misusing the identities of insurance card holders, Al-Hayat Arabic daily reported Saturday.

Medical facilities are also reported as providing unnecessary examinations and services "in many cases" in order to increase income from medical insurance companies.

Omar Hafidh, an insurance company executive director, told Al-Hayat that a "high percentage" of facilities offering services fail to properly check personal data — identity card or residency permit — of insurance claimants, resulting in "services being provided to persons not covered by insurance".

Hafidh cited various forms of deceit, from presenting bills for medical services not provided, to altering the nature or date of services and procedures rendered.

Rates of deception are also observed to increase proportionally further the distance the facility is from the main offices of the insurance companies.

"The rate of deceit is particularly high in Saudi Arabia. Fraudulent claims constitute approximately 15 percent of their annual revenues," he said, something which he put down to the industry being new in the Kingdom, with laws and regulations governing the sector "still in their infancy".

"We need to introduce more technology such as fingerprinting to check the background of the claimant," Hafidh said. "Some hospitals have fingerprint checking machines to prevent cards being used by persons other than their owners."



We need to introduce more technology such as fingerprinting to check the background of the claimant.

Omar Hafidh

Insurance specialist Fahd Al-Enizi said that most examples of fraud and deceit in the health sector were carried out in full compliance with the doctor, nurse or pharmacist. "The patient might be paid money without any medical examinations being carried out or any expense made on medication. This is a defrauding of the insurance company," he said.

The Health Security Council recently obliged private sector companies to provide health insurance for foreign resident staff in the Kingdom, while some three million Saudi nationals are expected to join them should the Council ruling to grant private sector Saudi employees and their families compulsory health insurance come into effect.

The health sector represents the largest insurance industry in the country, Al-Hayat said, with three main insurance firms accounting for over 85 percent of the sector.

— Saudi Gazette