

Establishing the First Diabetic Wound Care Center in Dubai



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Faris Ghani helps launch a health clinic in the Middle East to save people's limbs from amputation—and in some cases, their lives.

As of November 2021, the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) states that **537 million adults currently live with diabetes worldwide**—a 16 percent increase, or an additional 74 million people, since the 2019 estimates. In developing countries, diabetic infections commonly result in limb amputation, leading to a high mortality rate and putting the patient at a higher risk for additional amputations. With advanced clinics, specialists, and greater access to care, many amputations could be prevented, increasing a patient's life expectancy and quality of life.

From 2011 to 2020, Faris Ghani, a healthcare consultant based in BKD's Cincinnati office, worked with an entire network of professionals to establish a diabetic wound care and amputation prevention center in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), the first of its kind for the area. The clinic provides a comprehensive interdisciplinary program focused on early detection, prevention, and monitoring of wounds and diabetes complications, providing extensive treatment options centered on rapid healing.

"The life expectancy of anyone whose leg is amputated as a result of diabetes drops to an additional two to five years. Diabetic wound care treatments can prevent that amputation. Bringing this specialty to this part of the Middle East was a monumental task, but now we're helping to save lives," says Faris.

International background and opportunities in healthcare

In 2008, Faris began working with Emirates NBD, a large banking institution headquartered in Dubai. Equipped with both medical/financial and medical/operational backgrounds, he lived in the area for three years helping Emirates NBD launch a new medical leasing division within Dubai and Saudi Arabia, where he had roughly 120 people reporting to him and networked with professionals all the way to the royal family. He later returned to Cincinnati after the launch of the new division, where he worked as the chief operating officer of a large orthopedic and spine center and began collaborating with medical professionals on bringing a service to the Middle East.



Faris (first from right) with the DMPrevent team and representatives from Dubai's royal family, including His Royal Highness.

"I'd been attending the Arab Health Conference in Dubai from 2005 to 2019. I used what I learned and continued to research to find what specialty was most needed. There are many developing countries with major diabetic and wound issues that provide basic treatments for diabetes, but wound care services that are common in the U.S. just don't exist there," says Faris.

After substantial research, continued trips back and forth to Dubai, conversations with various doctors, and discussions with people at the UAE Ministry of Health, the need for a diabetic wound care center was clear.

American wound care center opens in 2018

Seeing some of his dad's struggles initially drew Faris' interest in the industry as he considered ways to improve processes at the physician level. "My father was a solo primary care practitioner, so I grew up seeing the good and the challenges of running a practice," he says.

Faris recognized that hospitals are huge machines with a lot of support, while independent physicians and smaller groups tend to struggle because of healthcare laws, guidelines, or lack of reimbursements. By observing the challenges that practices have or the healthcare industry has, he's also been able to identify areas where he can contribute.

To get this new project off the ground, phase one was all about meeting the necessary requirements of bringing a new service to market in a new country—it was also the toughest part. Faris spent roughly four years consulting with local insurance companies, the UAE Ministry of Health, and Dubai Health Care City (DHCC) on developing CPT codes and obtaining approvals on the codes and reimbursements, physician licenses, fee schedules, supplies, and equipment.

"We were really starting from scratch and covering every minute detail. It felt like we were creating the first cellphone that's ever existed," he says.

Next, it was time to locate physicians and investors to bring on board. Faris looked for potential investors who had a healthcare background, so they understood the benefits of what they were doing, as well as some sort of roots or association to the area. On the physician side, he sought older, experienced physicians who were open and comfortable going to Dubai. Initially from Pakistan, Faris has always had religious and cultural ties to the area.



DMPrevent 2018 team photo shoot, featuring Faris (first from right) and the team of doctors.



Faris (second from right) on a desert excursion with the DMPrevent doctor team.

"I associate myself with that world easily on the personal side, but the business side is different. Learning to do business there has taken a lot of adaptability," he says.

With all the paperwork, licensing, approvals, and professionals and associates on board, the pieces finally fell into place and the clinic opened to the public in 2018. Originally named DMPrevent, the clinic partnered with Novomed, an existing multi-specialty hospital in Dubai, which provides much of the clinic's patient referrals. Gradually, the American wound care clinic gained industry attention, and doctors interested in the service began sending over diabetic specialists to learn how to do wound care without facing infections and eventual amputation. Since making a profit, the clinic also has helped patients in financial need, covering travel expenses when possible. Following its success, a second location opened in January 2021.

"Not everyone can fly to Europe or America for care, whether it's because they can't afford a ticket or obtain a Visa. I hope I planted the seed with the clinic and that it continues to do well so more locations can open in other countries, providing more people access to that kind of care," says Faris.

A fresh perspective

Before joining BKD, Faris had his own consulting firm where he consulted for doctors and hospitals, but eventually he started to feel limited by the services he could offer. "If my clients needed a tax specialist, I had to refer them out. I felt like those service limitations weren't doing my clients justice," he says.

Once the wound care clinic was up and running, Faris was ready for a new role that would allow him to use his unique experiences and add the most value to his clients. He connected with Cincinnati Managing Director Scott Bezjak and Managing Partner Jim Creeden, who suggested he could be a great fit in BKD National Health Care Group.

"Faris didn't have the typical BKD healthcare consulting résumé, but it was evident in our initial conversations that his exceptional and varied background could bring value to our clients and prospects. It's exciting to see how his unique skill set complements not only our consulting practice but our tax and accounting outsourcing teams as well," says Jim.

Ultimately, what impressed Faris the most was BKD's culture.

"BKD has a successful, established history behind it, but it also has that entrepreneurial spirit when setting up an area of expertise. I love that combination, and the fact that there are so many people who have been at BKD for a long time, 10 to 15 years and beyond. That tells you a lot about an organization," he says.

Now that he's here, he loves bringing his international and U.S. experiences to help serve BKD's healthcare clients.

"I like to bring that fresh perspective, and I love making a true difference for physicians, physician groups, and healthcare organizations," says Faris.



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