

## Paradox...

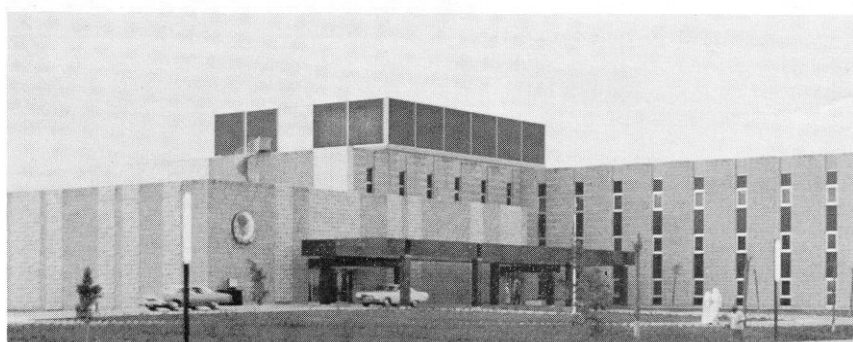
Nowhere is the attempt to achieve a technological and scientific leap from the Middle Ages to the 20th century as evident as on the outskirts of Riyadh on a 35-acre plot that used to be part of the Royal Palace's fruit and vegetable garden.

Here, in a mere four-and-a-half years, was erected and equipped the King Faisal Medical City, dominated by an elegant modern 250-bed hospital faced with honey-gold stones cut in a desert quarry 100 kilometers away. The City was conceived by King Faisal himself as part of his dream to help his country across the gap separating it from the modern world. He laid the foundation stone in November 1970, and the hospital was formally inaugurated last April—less than three weeks after his assassination.

Few medical projects anywhere have been as ambitious, or as controversial. Dr Rifat Alsayed Ali, personal physician to the royal family, who selected the medical equipment and supervised the installation of the hospital, envisions it as a seed to the development of medicine in the Arab world. The idea is not just to provide a sort of Arabic Mayo Clinic, but to fertilize rapid medical progress with the help of top foreign experts.

In a way this is what happened some 1,200 years ago, after Calif Haroun Al Rachid founded the first hospital in Bagdad, and Arab medicine rapidly absorbed and developed the Hippocratic medical tradition which had dominated the world. To some extent it may also be likened to the fertilization of American science by foreign migration during and after World War II.

At any rate, in Riyadh no effort or expense has been spared to create favourable working and living conditions for the 750 specialists who have started arriving on two-year contracts. Eventually there will be a staff of 1,200, capacity will be expanded to 500 beds and there will be a clinical research department.



The superbly equipped hospital may appear as a paradox in a country where the first group of doctors from the first medical school has yet to graduate. But then this is not inconsistent with a philosophy that some Saudis have called the Faisal school of thought: "given the will and the means, it is possible to start where knowledge ends."

One of the key elements in this impressive array of modern medical technology is a computer centre linked with 14 internal computer systems so that, from the start, a patient's record is kept up-to-date and remains instantly retrievable. Computer processing is also available for diagnostic tests in clinical biochemistry, audiometry, electro-cardiography and encephalography, electro-oculography, electro-myography and other procedures.

Similarly, the rest of the equipment is probably as sophisticated as can be found anywhere, and the specially designed audio-visual system is probably one of a kind. It even includes a fully-equipped four-channel colour broadcasting studio with facilities for recording, editing and producing video-tapes. There are plans to produce and broadcast a public medical and hygiene program to be aired on Saudi Arabian networks.

The hospital and surrounding city have their own power supply system of eight heavy-duty gas turbine generating sets. Surprisingly enough in this oil-rich country, the system is "energy-conscious"—waste heat is recovered to produce steam for the air-conditioning condenser units.

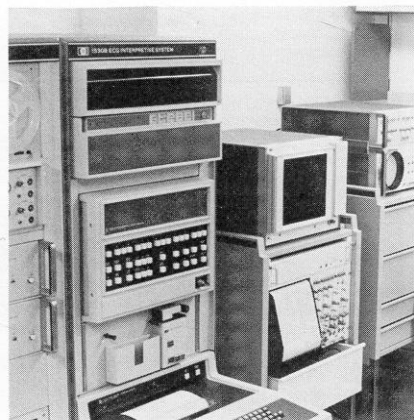
While medical services in the country are free of charge, the King Faisal hospital will be a paying one. "Otherwise," points out Dr Ali Rifat, "everyone will want to go there rather than to another hospital. But if any patient requires facilities or treatment available only here, he will be admitted as a free patient if he cannot pay. No one in need of specialist services will be turned away."

It is too early to say whether the gamble that the Medical City represents will pay off in the expected terms. How long will "Saudization" take is the most difficult question to answer, although a crucial one.

The first medical school in the country was opened in Riyadh in 1969 with an initial enrolment of 35. Now it has risen to 60, and, for the first time, women medical students are accepted (tradition does not allow them to be taught by men, so they follow courses in a separate classroom via closed-circuit TV, and ask questions by telephone).

There is, however, no teaching hospital for clinical training, and plans for a university campus (rather, two-one for men and one for women) do not appear to have been given the top priority accorded the King Faisal Medical City.

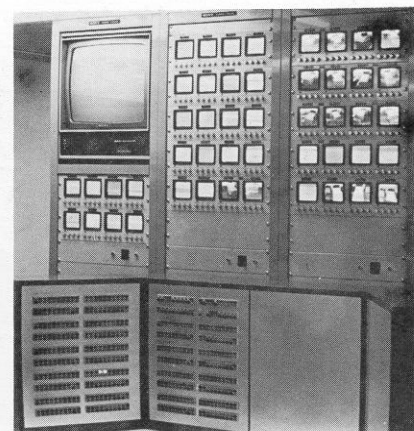
Work on the campus is scheduled to start this year, and it is expected that the faculty of medicine will be the first to move in, in 1978. If the effort is continued, this example of a scientific and technological leap across several centuries may well establish a record.



Computer interprets electrocardiograms.



Portrait of King Faisal in hospital lobby.



Closed circuit TV monitors hospital rooms.