

Ramsay Sime Darby uses tech to improve efficiency

BY **NADIA S HASSAN**

It is no secret that healthcare costs are going up. However, according to Ramsay Sime Darby Health Care Sdn Bhd CEO Greg Brown, the key to reining in cost is technological advancement.

A couple of months ago, the healthcare provider, best known for its flagship Subang Jaya Medical Centre (SJMC), introduced Live Chat as an option for patients to book appointments. "It used to be that you needed to call up the secretary of the specialist to make the appointment. Now, patients can go online, see what slots are free and decide there and then. It gives patients more control over their own healthcare," Brown explains.

When asked if going the tech route would lead to more cost savings, Brown says he prefers to call it efficiencies. "All around the world, people are trying to cope with the rising cost of healthcare. We are focusing on doing things more efficiently to help control cost so that we can remain affordable," he says.

According to MIDF Research, in 2016 and 2017, medical and healthcare costs in Malaysia grew at the highest rates in the region at 11.5% and 12.7% year on year (y-o-y) respectively. Inflationary pressure on healthcare costs is projected to jump 17% y-o-y this year.

MIDF Research notes that one way to keep costs down would be through digital healthcare.

Brown says another positive development from taking the technological route is that it frees up the staff to provide more value-added services, which makes it easier to exceed patient expectations when it comes to care.

In fact, Brown says that is why Ramsay Sime Darby is using five-star hotels as a service benchmark — a move that is not unheard of these days as private hospitals attempt to set themselves apart through service quality, right down to façades that mirror hotel lobbies.

"We are also looking at developing customer service courses in Ramsay Sime Darby Healthcare College. A number of our non-clinical staff came straight from school, so they would benefit from such courses.

To be able to provide training for our staff is critical. It is not just about improving our staff — from diploma courses to degree courses — but to also offer them short courses that can help them to upskill," he says.

Ultimately, Brown wants the staff to feel that they are treating a member of their own family. As such, although he acknowledges that the group is not the biggest in town, his main focus is not so much on matching competitors in size, but rather on what he calls "patient-centric" care. "For us, staff engagement is important in order to provide good service and that is a key priority. We feel that it is a privilege when patients choose us," he says.

One area in which Ramsay Sime Darby is looking to build on is day surgeries, and it is currently focusing on its day-of-surgery admissions centre, explains Brown.

"Our business is hospitals, but ideal-



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ly, we want a service where patients stay in our hospitals in as short a period as possible," he says. Currently, only 30% of its admissions are day-only, compared with Australia and other parts of the world, where it is 70% to 80%.

Ramsay Sime Darby also conducts focus groups often so that the stream of feedback — not only from the patients but their families as well — remains steady.

"One of the big things that we notice is that, unsurprisingly, people prefer to have single rooms when they come for treatment. So, upping the number of day surgeries would help to free up more rooms so we can meet that particular requirement," he says.

Brown is also a big advocate of patients being aware and taking part in their own care. He has added small touches such as whiteboards in the rooms so that everybody is kept up to date on the patient's illness.

However, Brown says what sets the group apart from its competitors is that its units are seen as community hospitals and there is a sense of belonging. "If you notice, we use the name of the location we are in and it is really important that our patients feel as though they can come to their hospital and we can provide the majority of services they need. That provides patients the opportunity to be treated locally and it takes a lot of pressure off their family who want to visit," he says.

Ramsay Sime Darby is a joint venture between Australia's Ramsay Health Care and Sime Darby Bhd. Its hospital portfolio in Malaysia includes ParkCity Medical Centre and Ara Damansara Medical Centre, apart from SJMC.

When asked if Ramsay Sime Darby is looking to increase its bed count, Brown says SJMC is pretty much at capacity but there could be some tweaking at the other two hospitals.

"SJMC is over 30 years old, so we need to have a plan on how to upgrade our equipment and physical facilities," he says.

According to its latest earnings release, the Ramsay Sime Darby joint venture achieved higher revenue in the financial year ended June 30 (FY2018), which contributed to a 58% increase y-o-y in Sime Darby's share of profits.

According to Sime Darby, the joint venture's Malaysian operations registered improved results from higher revenue and lower corporate expenses.

For FY2018, the joint venture's contribution to Sime Darby's profit before interest and tax stood at 5.3%. **E**