



Hospital accreditation as method for assessing quality in healthcare

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During the past years, healthcare organizations have been faced with challenges how to improve safety and quality healthcare services which they are serve to patients. The voice for healthcare quality improvements comes from key stakeholder groups, such as government, Ministry of Health, healthcare insurance fund, healthcare associations, healthcare professionals, patients and their families, public, etc. Also, international agencies, World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank clearly promote improvement of quality and safety of healthcare services.

Investments and simply adding more resources does not always achieve the desired improvements in healthcare services. The answers also lie in the processes through which care is delivered and in the way people organize their work.

Accreditation standard for hospitals present an attractive methodology for significant improvements in areas of healthcare. Achieving accreditation standards is very important to improve quality of healthcare services and processes, ensure a safe environment, and prevent or reduce risk to patients and staff; it helps healthcare providers to identify their own organizations strengths and weaknesses.

History of accreditation

The term accreditation means the systematic assessment of hospitals against accepted standards. Generally, accreditation has developed for hospitals, but during time, it is moved to primary care, laboratories services, and other healthcare sectors. The process of accreditation originates from the United States. The American College of Surgeons set up a program of standards to define suitable hospitals for surgical training in 1917. This developed into a multidisciplinary program of standardization and in 1951 led to the formation of the independent Joint Commission on Hospital accreditation, now the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), from which all subsequent national programs have been directly or indirectly derived (4). The number of programs around the world has doubled every five years since 1990 (2). Development has been especially

marked in Europe. There are 11 active programs (Bulgaria, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy (regional), Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland (two), and UK (three)) (3). To identify national accreditation programs, WHO has undertaken worldwide survey in late 2000, and findings showed that there are 36 national accredited programs (4).

To respond to a growing demand around the world for standards-based evaluation healthcare in the international community, Joint Commission International Accreditation (JCI) was established USA in 1998 (5). The JCI accreditations standards are based on consensus standards developed by healthcare professionals from many countries.

To promote development and compatibility in world, the International Society for Quality in Health Care (ISQua) launched Agenda for Leadership in Programs in Healthcare Accreditation (ALPHA) in 1999. ALPHA offers services for healthcare standards and accreditation bodies: survey and accreditation in accordance with international standards for national healthcare accreditation bodies and standards assessment against international principles for national healthcare (3).

Accreditation standards are available for different types of healthcare organization, such as hospitals, clinical laboratories, homecare, and nursing care, ambulatory care providers, transport care providers, etc. These standards are applicable in public healthcare organization as well as in private healthcare sectors.

Many benefits of accreditation, such as establishment of uniform polices, procedures and records, measurement of indicators of performances, management system and clinical system, etc., attract healthcare decision makers to adopt this program.

Trend in Serbia

Substantial progress has been made in our country by the implementation of Serbia Health Project by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia and World Bank, as part of project for health reforms in Serbia. Within this project, there is a subcomponent licensing and accreditation. The project will also support the establishment of an accreditation body for

healthcare providers in Serbia (6). Initial activities have been started to establish national accreditation standards: Commission for accreditation of healthcare institutions has been founded and program and plans have been made.

Accreditation process

Accreditation is a process in which organization outside the health care organization, usually non-governmental, assesses the organization to determine if it meets a set of standards designed to improve quality of care (5). When accreditation standards are implemented, healthcare organizations are required to continually monitor structures, processes, and outcomes, measure indicators, evaluate, and improve the quality of healthcare services.

Accreditations bodies are independent, non-profit organizations with main role to help healthcare organizations to examine and improve the quality and safety of services they provide to their patients. They offer healthcare organizations a voluntary, external peer review to assess quality by developing standards, assessing compliance with those standards.

The main stages in process of accreditation including creation of team project, choosing a model of standard, training of staff members, implement requires, self-assessment, selection of priority and improving areas, and survey visit. Usually, accreditation process comprises a self-assessment, on site survey carried out by a multidisciplinary team of healthcare professionals, a detailed report of findings, and periodic review.

During survey process, survey team visits a variety of inpatient and ambulatory units, and areas where high-risk services are provided to patients, including interviews with hospital leaders, professional staff members, and others. Accreditation is awarded when it has been demonstrated that a healthcare organization meets agreed standards. But the accreditation process does not end with the completion of the on-site survey; monitoring by accredited body continues during limited accredited period.

Conclusion

During the past years, there has been rapid growth, worldwide, in the establishment of national and regional accreditation programs for health services. However, hospital accreditation is not only method for assessing quality in health care (1). There are many others methodologies, such as ISO standards, Total Quality Management, Six-Sigma, Quality Awards (for example: Malcolm Baldrige Award in USA, European Quality Award, Business Excellence Award in Serbia, etc.), which may be used to improve quality in healthcare.

In rapidly daily changing healthcare industry, technology, and environment, healthcare organizations accept accreditation standards as a reliable platform, which helps healthcare providers to sustain system that addresses quality and safety of healthcare services.

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