

Healthcare Governance for Accountability and Transparency

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ABSTRACT

Healthcare governance is a framework for improving quality of care and access by increasing accountability and promoting transparency for the excellent outcome of healthcare, shared learning and sharing. Healthcare governance plays a vital role in improving patients' experiences, decreasing disparities in healthcare and shared learning from the experiences by promoting openness and culture of accountability. Service users' involvement, in the process of health planning and delivery, is an opportunity to improve their experience. It is now time to introduce strategies and policies in Nepal to implement the concept of healthcare governance to improve the quality of care and access.

Keywords: clinical governance; healthcare governance; openness; accountability; service users.

INTRODUCTION

Governance is a term used in many fields and it is linked with concepts such as control, authority, structure and system of governing. The word 'governance' is defined and discussed by a number of authors and scholars. Governance is defined in the context of corporate governance¹ and the requirement for accountability, openness and probity in corporate affairs. There is also focus on regulation and accountability aspects of the healthcare governance agenda.²

Healthcare governance is a framework to make sure that health services are delivered up to the standard or quality that is supposed to be delivered in an appropriate way to all service users. Healthcare governance defines healthcare professionals' accountability and responsibility for the delivery of healthcare. It is also discussed in the context of principal-agent theory which explores the notions of trust and checking.³ Furthermore, it sets patients or service users' expectations in terms of the health services they use. The healthcare governance bridges the gap between the services delivered and the expectations of service users. It creates proper structure, system and framework for all stakeholders

to deliver the right healthcare at the right time by the right method. The implementation of the healthcare governance system has a positive impact on the input, structures, processes and outcomes of the healthcare organisations.⁴ One study in a hospital in Vietnam shows that healthcare governance initiative, when effectively implemented, can function as a lever for behavioural transformations in the hospital towards ethical leadership, innovation, trust and knowledge sharing.⁵

The healthcare governance and clinical governance are used interchangeably and both have the same feature of promoting the culture of openness and accountability. In practice, the healthcare governance is a broader concept and applies to the whole health system, whereas the clinical governance is mainly for clinical set up and practices. As described in the diagram below, the healthcare governance has mainly six components - risk management, clinical audit, clinical effectiveness, complaint and complements, service users and staff experience, and compliance and standards. For achieving learning from each other, improving quality of care and excellent outcomes; there has to be stakeholder involvement, sound system and process;

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and continuous professional development of healthcare professionals. The healthcare governance is recognised internationally as a whole-system for framework for the continuous improvement of health service delivery by raising healthcare professionals' awareness of their own accountability for openness and excellence.⁶

Healthcare Governance Framework



Accountability

A clear line of responsibility and accountability for the effective and efficient delivery of healthcare is required at all levels. The lack of accountability in the health services is one of the contributory factors for failure of effective and efficient health services in Nepal. Professional accountability of policy makers, healthcare managers and professionals has been focused to improve the quality of care and access in health services in Nepal. The healthcare governance ensures that the service providers are liable, responsible and answerable to tax payers, service users and all stakeholders. It is important to note that accountability is the basic ingredient of professional code of conduct and a fundamental aspect of professionalism of healthcare professionals, and is clearly linked with improving performance, quality of care and professional development.

Transparency

One of the foundations of healthcare governance is transparency or openness. Continuous service improvement and organisational development demand openness and ability to make service improvements. Openness ensures that healthcare professionals develop a culture of sharing information and knowledge; and learning from mistakes in their clinical practices in healthcare organisations. The true openness includes the sharing of practice and experience that 'went wrong', with the intention of learning on how to improve the services and not to repeat the same mistakes in the future. Healthcare organisations have to create a system, process and culture for greater openness, learning and sharing.

Role of Service Users

Overall expectations of public services have risen in the last few decades, driven by higher rates of education, increased incomes and a more sophisticated mobile population.⁷ Health service users want better and faster access to services. Furthermore, they want health services closer to their homes. Service user involvement is increasingly becoming accepted by health service planners, service providers and service users as a valid concept, in which the need to listen and act on the views of patients and the public is an integral part of the planning and delivery of healthcare. Service user involvement is the opportunity for individuals who may be, or have been patients, to play an active role in decisions made about their treatment and care and to be included in debate about planning decisions for local organisations and the delivery of health services.

Service users' involvement in the planning, management and delivery of health services helps to promote openness and public engagement. As service users, they expect their healthcare to be provided by various healthcare professionals who respect service users and the healthcare choices they make. Service users seek to know their health experience and are prepared to work with them across settings to combine their knowledge and skills to meet their health goals.⁸ Service users are the real judges of health services and they need to actively participate in the process of health service delivery by giving feedback, acting as a pressure group and promoting their engagement.

Role of Government

The health policy agenda in Nepal for the last few decades has been dominated by the ideas of improving access and delivery of primary health care for marginalised and underprivileged population. One of the main objectives of the National Health Policy 1991 is to extend the primary health care system to the rural population so that they benefit from modern medical facilities and trained healthcare providers.⁹ Development and implementation of healthcare governance strategy and policy help to achieve the goals and objectives set by health authorities in Nepal. It has to be initiated without delay and good things can be started at anytime with little effort and resources. There is also the need to address patient safety, transparency, professional and organisational accountability to deliver the best possible healthcare outcome. The government's role is to include healthcare governance in the national priorities and to develop necessary policies and guidelines at the first instance. Then, the matter of implementing such policies and monitoring or supervising the actions and impact of healthcare governance comes at a later stage.

CONCLUSION

The healthcare governance is a framework for improving quality of care and access by increasing accountability and promoting transparency for the excellent outcomes of healthcare, shared learning and sharing. The main objective of the healthcare governance is the achievements of high standards of care with the main focus on integrated approach, accountability, transparency and improving quality of care. Organisational approach, sound system and processes are required to create the alignment necessary to deliver this objective. Given the problems and issues in management of healthcare in Nepal, the concept of healthcare governance has to be formally introduced by the government and other health authorities including professional bodies and councils in Nepal by introducing healthcare governance strategies and policies. Moreover, there has to be an appropriate structure at every healthcare organisation to clarify lines of accountability, to promote openness and to support healthcare governance.

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