



QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HEALTH CARE SERVICES: TIME TO SHIFT FROM QUANTITY TO QUALITY

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ABSTRACT

India is a large nation with a diverse range of health problems. From very beginning it has been a challenge to serve such a huge burden of population. Earlier the focus of the health system was target oriented; i.e. attention was given only to achieve the numbers. We were so much driven by the quantity of the health services, that quality of the services got compromised somewhere. But in recent past there has been a paradigm shift in health care services. The quality of services is also being looked at and considered adequately. With the initiatives like Kayakalp and LaQshya, the health system is on right path. Similar programs are also needed in near future to address quality assurance in other subsets of health system.

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INTRODUCTION

For ages the health system in our nation has been driven by the numbers and magnitude. Even today we are focussing on quantity rather than quality of services being provided. Number of family planning surgeries conducted, number of cataract surgeries carried, number of people enrolled under Ayushman Bharat scheme etc.; all are utilized to indicate progress. Though numbers are a great indicator of coverage by health system, we are still not able to capture the actual quality of services being provided. That part was a miss and still continues to be missing somewhere. The public health care services have been observed to lack quality features more often than their private counterparts. This has been often quoted as a major factor for loss of faith in Government run health institutions. This culminates in people opting for private health care services and causing incurring of much dreaded and talked about out of pocket health expenditure.¹ Moreover there is a need for evolution of health care institutions so that they can keep up with the ever evolving health care needs of the community. Policies and programmes have to be designed and executed for setting and attaining benchmarks for the standards of performance of the health facility. Our nation is also on a progressive course and has adopted quality standards in the recent past. There has been a shift of focus from quality rather than the quantity of services being provided.

As some initial steps, Government has launched few of initiatives in specific areas to meet the desired criteria of standards. The two specific quality assurance schemes in India that must be mentioned here are the Kayakalp and LaQshya initiatives.

Kayakalp is an innovative initiative launched by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) on 15th May 2015 as a part of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan campaign. The primary objective of this venture is promotion of cleanliness and delivery of quality health care services through public health facilities in India. It aims at quality improvement in public health care facilities through emphasis on six key parameters; namely 1) Hospital/Facility Upkeep 2) Sanitation and hygiene 3) Waste Management 4) Infection control 5) Support Services 6) Hygiene Promotion. This initiative aims to boost the functioning of public health care facilities by incentivizing and providing cash awards to the facilities that demonstrate high level of compliance to the above parameters.² Hilly state of Himachal has been a frontrunner in implementing this initiative with promising results.^{3,4} After its implementation, a visible change has been seen in the cleanliness and hygiene of the hospitals. The incentivized approach and periodic checking by Peer and then External Evaluation teams has also led the hospital administration to be continuously on their toes for the regular upkeep and maintenance of the facility.

LaQshya is a labour room quality improvement initiative launched in 2017 by MoHFW with an intention to reduce

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preventable maternal and newborn mortality, morbidity and stillbirths associated with the care around delivery in labour room and maternity operation theatres and ensure respectful maternity care. Interventions include Ensuring availability of optimal and skilled human resources as per case-load and prevalent norms through rational deployment and skill upgradation, Ensuring skill assessment of all staff of involved in management of child birth, sensitising care-providers for delivery of respectful maternity care and Creating an enabling environment for natural birthing process.⁵

Dedicated quality Consultants have been appointed under these schemes for constant supervision and monitoring. kayakalp has definitely aided into the upgradation of Public Health Care facilities to an acceptable standard on the other hand Lakshya has improved intra portal and perinatal maternal care. However these schemes are far from been universal many Healthcare facilities hostel lagging behind and are far from desired standards.

Learning from these and keeping the experience into account we need to develop more of such programs and initiatives. Innovations are required for all medical, surgical and public health sciences. This will lead to building of faith and trust in public health institutions and attract masses to such health institutions.

The quality assurance is a vital measure of assessing services provided to the care seekers. It also reflects the empathy of care providers to patients and the concern of facility administrators towards consumer patient perceptions. Necessary attention is to be given to the surveillance of services being provided. Health care facilities should be treating people not only by numbers, but also should ensure the quality of those amenities. There is a dire need for the upgradation of our public health facilities to cope up with the ever evolving health sector. The significance and relevance of standard tools for evaluation of quality assurance in health care facilities can neither be challenged nor denied. It will definitely encourage hospital administration and staff for better maintenance of the health facility by means of incentivization. Moreover it would serve the ultimate purpose of provision of quality health care services to the masses at an affordable price, simultaneously keeping a check on out of pocket expenditure.

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