

A European priority?

The University of Klagenfurt's Guido Offermanns asks whether the management of quality and safety in healthcare in Europe should be redesigned in its entirety

Quality and safety are two major public health and management issues which represent a significant health outcome and financial challenges for European societies. The research and consultancy of the working group Management and Economics in Healthcare in Vienna and Klagenfurt, Austria, directed by Professor Guido Offermanns, has been tackling management, quality and safety concerns over the last ten years. The group discusses and solves important quality and safety issues in healthcare organisations.

As a public health challenge, quality management and patient safety in healthcare has received increasing attention since the mid-1990s from healthcare providers, health insurance companies, local and national governments and the European Union. Nonetheless it still has a fundamental and growing role in the international healthcare and quality improvement debate. Studies show that there is a lot to do in reaching the goals of Horizon 2020 and other research programmes in co-operation with further important research areas such as medicine, nursing science and public health.

Redesign the system

Modern healthcare presents the most complex quality and safety challenge of any activity on Earth. Until today, however, healthcare leaders have failed to design systems for safety, relying instead on requiring individual error free performance enforced by punishment – a strategy abandoned long ago by safer industries such as aviation and nuclear power.

To make healthcare safe and to improve quality, health professionals need to redesign the systems to make errors and quality problems difficult to commit. They need to create a culture in which the existence of risk and questionable quality is acknowledged and injury prevention is recognised as everyone's responsibility: a new understanding of accountability that moves beyond blaming individuals when they make mistakes. Evidence-based decisions must be established if progress is to be made.

Further research is required in facing future challenges. This will give evidence-based possibilities that decision makers can choose from. One question involved will be the integration of refugees in the European social system.

To transfer knowledge from theory to practice, a suitable way of communication must be guaranteed. It is the only way to ensure sustainability to healthcare systems and organisations. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that team and personnel development should be practised to ensure excellent performance for European societies and patients.

So, one of the most important things is to transform healthcare management through implementing evidence-based instruments to measure and improve the outcomes of all treatments for patients in primary, secondary and tertiary care. One of our latest contributions represents a pilot project in Bosnia-Herzegovina by measuring the grade of patient safety in hospitals in local districts. It was the first study performed in this country and provides primary and exclusive insights to this important field for patients, health professionals and hospital leadership.

Further research, which should be carried out in close collaboration with diverse European partners, is also required to improve the degree of quality and patient safety in southeast Europe.

We are working in an international team with native speakers from Germany, Austria, the UK, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey, Ukraine and Russia. Our research focus lies in projects across Europe including non-EU members and candidate members such as Turkey.

Brain drain of health professionals

One further issue to mention is the migration of healthcare professionals. The so-called 'brain drain' is an increasing problem for new EU member states as well as candidate countries. Concepts, which ensure the quality of local care and offer perspectives of further development, must be merged with existing research.

Another project deals with the challenge of changing conditions in inpatient and outpatient care. Together with international partners, government and providers such as the European Health Management Association, the European Observatory and other healthcare suppliers (e.g. in projects of health professional mobility and cross-border healthcare), we develop concepts, methods and instruments to face demographic and innovation challenges, as well as issues concerning patient-centered care in rural communities.



Guido Offermanns
Associate-Professor Dr
University of Klagenfurt
Management and Economics in Healthcare, and
Karl Landsteiner Institute for Hospital Management

+43 463 2700 4133

guido.offermanns@aau.at