

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33314/jnhrc.v19i1.3544>

Essentials of Health Care Management: Challenges and Way Forward

Ganesh Dangal¹

¹Journal of Nepal Health Research Council, Ramshah Path, Kathmandu, Nepal.

INTRODUCTION

Health care management is the profession that provides leadership and direction to health care organizations like hospitals. Management Team/ Committee/ Board is needed to coordinate the services provided within health care organization for the purpose of accomplishing its set objectives.¹ Therefore, understanding the roles, responsibilities, and functions carried out by health care managers is very critical to all stakeholders of health care organizations. The managerial positions in a health care organization include supervisor, coordinator, and director in addition to the senior manager or lead administrator. It is desirable for them to be familiar with the basics and essentials of health care management and administration. In an ideal situation and in a robust set up, they should preferably have the Master of Science in Healthcare Administration or MBA in Hospital Administration or its' equivalent so as to have sufficient knowledge and skill necessary to address real-world healthcare challenges constructively. Majority of health institutions in developing countries like ours have witnessed incompetent managerial skills of its leaders that usually lead to ineffective health care delivery, failure and dissatisfaction.

COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE HEALTHCARE MANAGEMENT

The complex nature of these organizations requires that managers provide leadership, as well as the supervision and coordination of employees. Tasks of managerial services in health care organizations require the coordination and collaboration of multiple highly specialized disciplines that must work together as a team proficiently. Managers are needed to ensure that organizational tasks are carried out in the best way possible to achieve its predetermined goals with adequate, optimized and appropriate financial and human resources. Health care managers shape the organization by making important decisions like

recruitment and development of staffs, acquisition of technology, service additions and reductions, and allocation and spending of financial resources for better overall performance and they need to focus on ensuring that the patient receives the most appropriate, timely, and effective services possible.²

As hospitals become rapidly growing and increasingly complex technical environment employing people with widely divergent skills, the need to manage them efficiently without any compromise to the humane and caring environment that the sick need, brings forth the need for a new type of health professionals- the professional hospital managers. Successful hospital administrators/managers should be proficient in business management in healthcare administration and develop quantitative, technical and conceptual skills that are required in high performing healthcare units and hospitals. They should be well-versed in the principles of management, efficient business handling as well as the details of inputs in the administration of healthcare units and facilities all around the world. As the backbone of healthcare systems, they should have knowledge and skill of business policy and strategic management, applied epidemiology, pharmaceutical management, hospital planning, quality management, management controls systems, legislation and ethics for health and hospital, and so on.²

The role of manager is critical in ensuring a high level of organizational performance, and managers are also instrumental in establishing and maintaining organizational culture, talent recruitment and retention, leadership development and succession planning, innovation and change management, and shaping health care policy.³ Effective health care management involves exercising professional judgment and skills and carrying out the set managerial functions at three levels: self, unit/team, and organization wise. The primary role of the manager is to ensure that the unit, service,

Correspondence: Prof Dr Ganesh Dangal, Chief Editor, Journal of Nepal Health Research Council, Ramshah Path Kathmandu, Nepal. Email: ganesh.dangal@gmail.com.

division, or organization he or she leads achieves high performance. They should possess sound conceptual, technical, and interpersonal skills to carry out the obligatory managerial functions of planning, organizing, staffing, directing, controlling, and decision making of healthcare institutions -the pillars of which are people (employees, patients, and physicians), services, quality, finances, and growth.⁴

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES IN HEALTHCARE MANAGEMENT

Certain areas of challenges must be addressed if the leader is to be successful. Complying regulations and laws of the land is critical and is a barrier at times. Technology is a costly requirement in any work setting. Information systems management, tele-medicine and expensive new medical equipment for the modern health care facility are integral part due to rapid medical advances in the medical field. Institutions should provide reimbursement incentives to accountable providers who produce high-quality outcomes, and disincentives for the provision of poor-quality. Coordinated efforts must shift from following up on errors to preventing their recurrence to developing systems and mechanisms to prevent them from ever occurring.⁵

A leader must ensure an environment in which good ethical behavior is followed. Managers are continually challenged to motivate a workforce to do two things- make the organization achieve its goals and achieving their own personal goals. Motivation in terms of reward and incentives matters. Healthcare managers are responsible for productively using the informational, financial, physical, and human resources of their organizations to deliver standard patient services. Leadership, motivation, managing health care professionals, and teamwork are some of the most important interpersonal skills- are critical "soft skills" to lead. Managing healthcare professionals and human resource management are critical. In addition to healthcare cost of its employee and the dependents, an understanding of finance for better management of costs and revenues; managing the patient health insurance function well will be critical to the financial prosperity of the organization.⁵ However, in Nepal health insurance system is still in infancy.

Health care leaders are role models for their organizations' employees, and they need to be aware that their actions are being watched all times. The wise health care leader will include physicians early on in any planning process. Similarly, health care leaders must pay special attention to physicians during the current period

to overcome any resistance to change as the health care system evolves.

CHALLENGES IN HOSPITAL MANAGEMENT IN NEPAL

Hospital management is an emerging field which is regarded as an important discipline and integral part in the context of Nepal as well. Hospital management has to deal with the provision of health-related services, training, education and research. It has identified that the hospital is not only a place of treating the patients, but also a place where the activities for health promotion are run, all health services are provided, trainings are conducted, education is given and researches are carried out. Research should be viewed as an investment rather than expenditure.

There is no doubt that a strong management system through a systematic and organized approach increases its performance by aligning the goals and objectives throughout the organization to attain the best possible results from the available resources.⁶ Curative health services have a major role in providing quality health service to the people and it cannot be delivered properly if the health care provider organizations are not strong.⁷ Hospitals are the key component of health care delivery system and they need to be reformed to ensure a quality health care system.^{3,8}

A competent and motivated health workforce forms the core of a high-quality, effective and efficient health system. Unfortunately, many hospitals in Nepal are poor in quality management and they are not able to deliver quality health services to the people efficiently. Nepal has been facing several challenges to establish a functional health management system and has a challenge regarding the management of hospitals. Nepal's health system is still in transition and the concept of hospital management is still beyond the priority of the government and the non-governmental stakeholders.⁹

There is a lack of a cadre of professional managers for the rapidly growing hospital sector. In health care, many clinicians who do well at their jobs are generally promoted to supervisory positions. Yet they do not have the management or administrative training that would help them to be successful in their new roles. However, outcome in terms of universal quality health care is unsatisfactory. However, in Nepalese context, hospital management cannot achieve its goals until there is an effective service giving and taking culture, until the planning body is capable enough, until the inter and intra-organizational communication is strongly

developed and there is a commitment to provide top management support toward the bottom.

WAY FORWARD

The profession of health care management is challenging yet rewarding, and requires persons in managerial positions at all levels of the organization to possess some key competencies of the effective manager to carry out the necessary managerial functions.

Lack of professionalization of the existing human resources, unavailability of skilled human resources, and less financial resources are the barriers for the development of hospital management in Nepal. Therefore, the government and non-government health sector should recognize hospital management as a separate and essential discipline. Academia and universities should now also focus on the growth and development of hospital/ healthcare management professionals and professionalization of healthcare managers and leaders.

REFERENCES

1. Longest BB, Rakich JS, Darr K. Managing health services organizations and systems. Baltimore: Health Professions Press; 2000.
2. Thompson JM, Buchbinder SB, Shanks NH. An Overview of Healthcare Management. In: Buchbinder SB, Shanks NH, editors. Introduction to Health Care Management. 3rd edition. USA Maryland: Jones and Bartlett learning; 2017. Available from: https://samples.jbpub.com/9780763790868/90868_CH01_FINAL_WithoutCropMark.pdf
3. Thompson JM. Health services administration. In: Chisolm S, editor. The health professions: Trends and opportunities in U.S. health care. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett; 2007. Available from: https://samples.jbpub.com/9780763759643/59643_CH02_5289.pdf
4. Katz RL. Skills of an effective administrator. Harvard Business Review. 1974; 52:90–102. Available from: <https://hbr.org/1974/09/skills-of-an-effective-administrator>
5. Buchbinder SB, Shanks NH, editors. Introduction to Health Care Management. 3rd edition. USA Maryland: Jones and Bartlett; 2012. Available from: http://samples.jbpub.com/9780763790868/90868_FMxx_FINAL_WithoutCropMark.pdf
6. Hospital Management. NY, USA; 2011 Available from: <https://www.hospitalmanagement.net>
7. Wallace M. Older Adult. In: Edelman C and Mandle C, eds. Health Promotion Throughout the Lifespan, 6th edition. St. Louis: Mosby Year Book, Inc; 2006, pp. 571-600. Available from: <https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/nursing-books/52>
8. Healy CM, McKay MF. Nursing stress: the effects of coping strategies and job satisfaction in a sample of Australian nurses. J Adv Nurs. 2000;31(3):681-8. doi: 10.1046/j.1365-2648.2000.01323.x. PMID: 10718888.
9. WHO. Health System in Nepal: challenges and strategic options. WHO Country Office: Kathmandu; 2007. Available from: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/205257/B0677.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>