



Service Line Management: A New Paradigm in Health Care System

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ABSTRACT

Health care organizations are required to implement modern management practices and approaches due to the importance of improving quality and increasing efficiency of health care services. Service line management of healthcare services is one of the new approaches that managers of health sectors are interested in. The “service line” approach will organize the management of inpatient and outpatient in clinical services focusing on patient diagnostic clusters. Services specific in each patient diagnostic cluster will be offered by a multidisciplinary team including nurses, physicians, and so on. Accordingly, the present study aims to evaluate the features, process and benefits of service line management approach in the provision of health services. In this descriptive study, internal and external scientific database have been reviewed and the necessary data have been extracted from the latest research projects and related scientific documents. The results showed that the new management approach is based on a paradigm shift from traditional health care system management to healthcare service line management with a focus on managers’ competencies. Four specific manager’s competencies in this new management model are: conceptual, collaborative, interpersonal, and leadership competencies. These competencies should be developed in health system managers so as to lead to organizational excellency and improvement of health service quality. The health sector managers should strengthen these four key competencies and act on them. Then they will become effective leaders and managers in the health system.

Keywords: Health care services, diagnosis cluster, service line management

INTRODUCTION

The traditional model of providing health services has long been developed to offer the widest set of health care services to beneficiaries. Due to economic conditions and the competitive situation in the market, health organizations need to assess and reassess their own services to become more efficient and more economical [1]. For this purpose, managers and leaders of healthcare systems are required to adopt a strategic approach to clinical services provision so as to focus their organizations on specific areas. These specific functional areas should be focused on improving service quality, increasing productivity, customer satisfaction and value creation for customers[2].

The “service line management” approach will organize the management of inpatient and outpatient in clinical services focusing on patient diagnostic clusters. Services specific in each patient diagnostic cluster will be offered by a multidisciplinary team including nurses, physicians, hospital’s manager, marketing, financial section, and hospital services [3].

The abovementioned team is responsible for providing qualitative and safe service for the patient. Activities of each team will be coordinated by a service line manager. The potential benefits of such an approach include:

- focusing on the patient
- improving the quality of care and patient safety
- Continuity of care
- improving coordination in providing care
- creating a common vision and goal

- Ability to quickly respond to market changes
- providing standard care
- Arguments about how to allocate resources (staff, beds, capital, etc.)
- Increasing accountability
- Attracting and retaining personnel
- Efficient spending of resources
- Limited financial resources management.

In addition to limiting and at the same time increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of organization's programs, the new management approach leads to significant changes in the current management approach of organizations, which will not simply be passed [3,4]. Although some analysts may view this management approach as a threat to power, money, programs, and professional identity, but it will be covered by the advantages mentioned above.

A proper organizational structure is necessary to implement the new management approach in health centers more successfully and facilitate the implementation process [5]. The main components of this type of organizational structure is shown in the figure1:

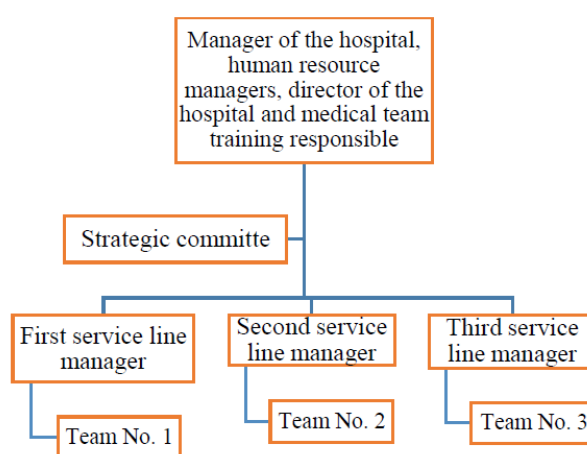


Figure 1. Proper organizational structure to implement service line management

Each service line that is composed of service provision team (physician, nurse, hospital managers, reinforcements and financial affairs' responsible) is managed by a coordinator named service line manager [6,7]. Depending on the type of service offered, line service manager can be a physician or nurse or other members of the treatment team. Responsibilities of service provision team include:

1. Monitoring the quality and price of care provided
2. Providing services
3. Treatment and care services marketing
4. Developing strategic plan
5. Establishing effective health communication
6. Identifying and improving treatment and care processes
7. Establishing communication between managers of health centers and medical staff.

In general, service line managers evaluate the program and provide the strategic committee with necessary reports and recommendations and their ultimate goal is improving the quality of services provided and increasing the patients satisfaction [8,9].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was a descriptive study that was done in 2016 conducting library and field studies, internet search in domestic and foreign authoritative sites and databases including, CINAHL Sciencedirect/andoc, Pubmed, and ISI, journals related to management researches, and using keywords related to the literature to identify papers focused on line service management in healthcare centers (from 2000 onward).

RESULTS

After reading related articles and resources based on the research objectives, the results showed that service line management is a combination of management techniques (collaborative, interpersonal and effective leadership) and business planning that is planned and implemented to provide qualitative healthcare services through coordination and connection with the national health system. Service line management includes identification of different business units or service lines, identification of national health system capabilities in healthcare centers, and understanding the how of using them. This management approach allows health managers to prepare and submit progress reports related to improvement of service quality and increase in productivity in the professional level [10].

Service line management allows managers effectively use available sources and management techniques to ensure effective healthcare provision through service line monitoring. In the meantime, existence of some merits and characteristics including the spirit of team work, understanding the concepts of health and disease, ability to understand treatment process and leadership of the mentioned process is essential for service line managers [11]. The health care team's responsibilities in this management approach include:

1. Monitoring the quality and appropriateness of the price of services offered
2. Health services provision
3. Services marketing
4. Strategic planning and business development
5. Increasing communication in the professional level
6. Identifying and improving the quality of services offered
7. Facilitating communication between senior managers and line staff

In general, implementing healthcare service line management includes the following steps:

- Identifying objectives and organizational structure
- Defining service lines
- Developing indicators of services evaluation
- Forming service delivery teams and designating service line managers
- Auditing service lines
- Preparing and developing annual program of service line management for organization [12].

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Service line management is a powerful way to manage the national health system. Health centers that have used this new management approach have enjoyed greater efficiency, higher quality of care, greater recruitment and retention of physicians, and also greater competitive power in health care market. While many hospitals have tried to implement this new management approach, but there has been less success at the national level. This is because of two reasons. First, managers' lack of knowledge about treatment processes in the target hospitals and thus, lack of full implementation of management approach and second, managers' lack of ability to properly lead and manage processes.

To achieve both objectives and fully implement the new management technique, training and empowering managers in health care organizations, changing organizational structure, developing incentive plans, effective health care teams' communication, developing business plans, supporting science and information technology sections, and human resource management are all essential.

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