

023: QUALITY PRACTICES AND BUSINESS OUTCOMES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HOSPITALS

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Objectives:

The objectives of the study were to identify which quality practices produced the highest level of patient care and the economic and organisational benefits of having effective quality processes in place.

Methods:

In Western Australia clients who required health care had to wait 30 months or more for elective surgery at public hospitals. The government had to find an extra \$70 million to bail out hospitals who could not meet their budgets. As many as 50,000 patients were injured and 18,000 died each year due to errors in hospital provided healthcare. 1.7 million bed days were used caring for patients with potentially preventable adverse effects from health care provided. The most effective practices in healthcare quality activities needed to be identified to overcome these problems.

The research study was conducted as an exploratory multi-case control study.

A pilot study was conducted and the research tools were then revised to improve reliability and validity.

Ethical approval to conduct the research study was gained from 8 randomly selected hospitals.

Data was collected through the use of a questionnaire (71 questions. Response rate 99%. 167/168 completed), interviews (16 questions. Response rate 99%. 174/176 interviewed), hospital records and observation.

The research data was collected over a 2-year period.

Results:

The research identified that the most important factor for producing cost-effective high standard healthcare was the mission and culture of caring within an organisation.

The most effective management strategies were: managers showing strong leadership in promoting care, consideration, health and safety of employees, customers and potential customers; providing adequate human and material resources and good workplace conditions; being team orientated; providing and facilitating employee education; planning, setting and implementing standards; providing clear methods for performance of tasks; providing competent supervision; regularly evaluating organisational activities, providing feedback and implementing follow-up actions as necessary; communicating effectively.

The most important employee activities were: having a culture of caring for everyone on the premises; being provided with enough time to complete work tasks; working together as a team; being educated in work related tasks; being empowered, consulted and participating in the planning, implementation and evaluation of services and change; having security of continuing employment; communicating effectively; suppliers of goods and services needed to be made partners in quality activities. Research needed to be conducted in the hospital to improve the quality of service; and the findings publicised throughout the organisation and used to make improvements.

The outcomes of using these strategies were: customer satisfaction; a high standard of healthcare; delivery of cost effective service; minimal employee occupational injuries and sick leave; employee commitment. Good organisation wide communication; ability to adapt to changes in government policy; continual improvement in organisational activities. For private hospitals, outcomes included an increase in the number of customers.

Conclusions:

A Quality Care Model for use in healthcare organisations was developed based on the research findings. Use of this model will enable quality and safety to be included in the design stage of all health service activities, to facilitate improved health care management, and the identified outcomes that occur when these strategies are used. Findings of this research have been used by the National Expert Advisory Group on Safety and Quality in Health Care to make recommendations to Australian State and Federal Health Ministers. Using this advice the Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care has been established and a Safety Innovations in Practice Program has been commenced for further research into improving safety and quality in health care for the Australian Public.