

382: HEALTH EXECUTIVES OF ESTONIA ASSESS THE QUALITY OF HEALTH SERVICES

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Objective:

The objectives of this study were to ask all of the middle managers and top executives in the Estonian health care system to describe the state of the quality of various health services in Estonia.

Methods:

A mail survey was sent to 1586 middle managers and top executives in the health care system, including sickness fund managers, health protection agency managers, Ministry of Social Affairs officials, and local and county health officials. The study population consisted of all health care executives listed in the health care facilities telephone directory and on the internet. The survey was sent to the entire study population three times, since the survey instrument had no personal identifier code. Respondents were asked to indicate their gender, age, education, position, type of health care organization and region of Estonia. The health care system of Estonia has undergone many reforms. Therefore, this study asked Estonian health care executives to evaluate the quality of the health care system in their respective counties after the reforms. Respondents were asked to give their general evaluation of the quality of health services in Estonia as well as the quality of the following services: primary health care, dental care, specialized outpatient care, inpatient care, rehabilitation services, nursing and social care. Differences in assessments and opinions were analyzed using Chi-Square statistics and Spearman correlations, respectively. The statistical procedures were conducted using the SPSS 10.0 for Windows package. The reliability of the survey instrument was tested by Cronbach's alpha (0.85)

Results:

Over a third (37%) of Estonia's health care executives (n=589) completed the survey and the structure of responses by region, position and facilities shows that the completed surveys are reflective of the total population. Of the respondents, 27.8% evaluated the quality of health services as good and 62.7% as satisfactory. The highest evaluation was given to the quality of dental care and inpatient care – 51% of respondents evaluated the quality as good or very good. The quality of specialized outpatient care was evaluated as good or very good by 41.2% of the respondents. The quality of the primary health care services were evaluated as satisfactory by more than 1/2 of the respondents (52.5%) and good by (29.2%). The quality of the rehabilitation services was evaluated as good by 25.6% and satisfactory by 33.1% of the respondents. The lowest evaluation was given to the quality of nursing and social care services, with 36.3% and 50.3% of respondents respectively, evaluating the quality of these services as bad or very bad. General evaluations of quality correlated significantly ($p < 0.0001$) to the evaluations of quality for specific services: inpatient care ($r = 0.33$); specialized outpatient care ($r = 0.29$); dental care ($r = 0.24$); primary care ($r = 0.20$); and rehabilitation services ($r = 0.15$). The evaluations of respondents did not differ significantly by gender, age, education, position and regions.

Conclusions:

Most of the responding executives assessed the quality of health services in Estonia to be satisfactory, however, the evaluations varied by specific health care services. The Estonian health care system has undergone considerable changes during the last ten years, notably the introduction of mandatory health insurance in 1992 and primary health care reforms, which started in the middle 90s. In 2001, hospital reforms were started with the purpose of converting a number of small hospitals to nursing homes and to consolidate specialized inpatient care in the larger hospitals. The results of this pioneering study could be regarded as laying the foundation for further evaluations of the health care system in Estonia by the providers of health services.