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## **Total quality management (TQM) training under severe economic crisis The Argentinean Experience of the Health Care Private Sector**

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### **The economic crisis in Argentina and its effect on the health sector**

The health care private sector in Argentina represents practically 50 % of all medical care services. With a total of 67,000 beds and 600,000 employees, it produces around 2,600.000 discharges per year.

By the end of 2001, Argentina confronted a severe economic crisis with important negative consequences in the health sector. Since then, 300-percent devaluation has produced an increase in the cost of all imported medical supplies with negative effects on the management of all medical services. At the same time, the lack of funding in most health care insurance organizations and the increase of the population poverty levels have had a direct influence on the decrease of medical care demand.

### **Objective:**

TQM training activities to motivate leaders to confront health sector economic crisis and to integrate health services into a self-evaluation and accreditation process.

### **Methods:**

In this scenario, the institutions representing the health care private sector\* have decided to develop a three - step strategy to facilitate quality and efficiency of services: 1. An intensive training program for TQM; 2. A program to support self-evaluation activities; and 3. An accreditation process for quality.

The first strategy implemented was an 80-hour training module aiming to introduce TQM methods in health service facilities and to encourage clinics to start self-evaluation activities towards accreditation utilizing the economic crisis as a challenge to move towards quality and efficiency. Each clinic participated with a team of at least three professionals from different fields (medical doctors, nurses and administration).

Educational methodology stressed the utilization of PBL (problem-based learning) in order to facilitate the application of knowledge in each specific situation.

A total of 1000 participants representing around 300 health care institutions have been part of the experience.

### **Results:**

After three years, results have been measured considering not only the number of participants in training activities but also new policy definitions and TQM strategies implemented. Out of the 300 participating institutions, a total of 193 have decided to join a Self-Evaluation Program and 43 of them are now actively working towards accreditation for quality. Preliminary results also indicate- that those clinics are presently in a better position to overcome the economic crisis.

### **Conclusions:**

Economic crisis and severe managerial restrictions can be confronted with strategies towards educational activities for the development of active leadership aiming to implement TQM for quality and efficiency and to introduce self-evaluation and accreditation programs.