

Integration among Health Professionals in Sicily

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Objective:

To diminish fragmentation and increase collaboration among stakeholders in health care delivery, especially among GPs and hospital Specialists, in order to reduce inappropriate prescriptions of hospitalizations, laboratory and x-ray services by GPs and improve health service quality, mainly by optimizing resources and reducing wastes and waiting lists.

Methods:

The project was developed in response to the preoccupations expressed by WHO of the heavy fragmentation in service delivery with consequent non co-ordinated, ineffective and inefficient results and poor quality of care to the population. The project, under the program TUFH (Toward Unity for Health), means to answer to the challenge put forth by WHO to search for feasible and sustainable solutions to the problem of fragmentation. CEFPAS' project was selected as one of 12 worldwide projects and was particularly valued for its innovation.

The methodology included monthly meetings among all stakeholders involved: GPs working in 3 Health Districts; clinical specialists coming from 18 Hospital Departments, managers of 2 laboratories and 3 radiological services at community level.

During the meetings, critical issues were selected and thoroughly addressed in order to reach a common understanding. To do this, different methods have been used:

- 1) Sharing of experiences with all points of view being considered;
- 2) Round table discussions;
- 3) Data collection through questionnaires and joint analysis of results;
- 4) Data collection from existing records and shared analysis of results;
- 5) Writing protocols of collaboration using "Continuous Quality Improvement" and "Evidence Based Medicine" approaches.

Results:

1. The main result is the creation of a common platform among stakeholders that usually don't share their different perspectives and experiences on common issues and often have poor communication and poor inter-relation among them. This is detrimental to the health system and, more generally, to the quality of care.
2. Eleven health indicators were jointly selected. The initial data provided the baseline and data will be collected periodically to monitor expected improvements.
3. The first data collection on GPs prescriptions shows:
 - a) hospitalizations requested by GPs: only 3%, which need to be increased as GPs should filter hospitalization demands;
 - b) appropriate hospitalizations: 96%, which is highly appropriate;
 - c) CAT scans for suspected neoplasia carried out within 7 days was 72%: this needs to be increased.
 - d) protein electrophoresis was 18%, which needs to be reduced.
4. Creation of a questionnaire for GPs and Hospital Doctors aiming at exploring the use of EBM and at identifying major difficulties experienced in the working relationship.
5. Results of questionnaires were presented and discussed together: this brought about more understanding and more co-operation among all stakeholders.
6. Common protocols have been finalised and put into place on critical conditions
7. A system has been activated for direct communication between GPs and Hospital Doctors in order to assure continuity of patients' care.

Conclusions:

The project has achieved its main goal. The groups of stakeholders have worked well in an atmosphere of fruitful collaboration. The results obtained have contributed to improving patients' care, reducing unnecessary laboratory and radiology investigations, shortening waiting lists for specific services. Mainly, it has created the basis for a new culture that aims at reducing fragmentation in health care delivery and improving collaboration for more cost-effective services and higher quality care. The ultimate benefits involve the health system and the population. Due to the enthusiasm which the project generated, additional stakeholders have now committed themselves to the continuation of the project for a more effective way of working together towards a more concrete unity for health.