

**REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE
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**DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION FOR THE HOSPITAL SECTOR
IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

Objectives of the meeting

The objectives of this session are to:

- highlight the strategic importance of the hospital sector within health systems in moving towards universal health coverage;
- present a situation analysis of public hospitals in the Region;
- identify key regional challenges and priorities in the area of hospital care and hospital management;
- share experiences in the area of hospital management outside the Region;
- introduce the WHO position paper on the role of hospitals within WHO's integrated people-centred health services framework;
- present a preliminary draft of a strategic framework for action for the hospital sector in the Region.

Background

Hospitals are costly components of a health system and depend on a wide array of resources in order to function effectively. Many hospitals, especially in the public sector in the Region, have failed to evolve in terms of operational processes and infrastructure, with standards of care and efficiency declining in some hospitals. In order to identify key challenges and priorities in the areas of hospital care and management, WHO has recently conducted two situation analysis of the hospital sector in order to gather information to inform the development of a regional strategic framework for action, covering: the role of hospitals in different health care settings; governance and management; planning; monitoring; equipment/building; human resources; financial management; information management; quality improvement, patient safety and patient centredness; and emergency care. Sources used to collect quantitative and qualitative information included two self-administered questionnaires, literature and document reviews, and interviews with experts and national focal points for hospital management in ministries of health of the Region.

Challenges

Countries in the Region face a range of challenges regarding hospital planning and management. Most countries have a mix of public and private (non-for-profit and for-profit) hospital sectors and the majority of hospital beds are in the public sector, with the exception of Lebanon. Most countries do not have a national strategy for the hospital sector and the components of hospital planning are not well aligned with the budget allocated for hospitals.

The roles, responsibilities, and the relationship of public and private hospital sectors in providing hospital services at national/local level are not been adequately defined in most countries. Institutional and managerial governance are important issues that have not been given appropriate consideration in most countries. The role of government is often not well defined and its capacities in regulating, setting standards and monitoring the performance of public and private hospitals are not at a satisfactory level in most countries. Essential hospital service packages for different types of hospital have not been developed and most countries use traditional line-item budgets to finance the sector. Many countries lack an established national/local policy to specify the location, size and types of service of hospitals. There is inequitable distribution of hospital beds and health technology in most countries. In spite of the development of IT-based referral systems in some countries, many countries lack functioning referral and follow

up systems and networking of lower with higher levels of facilities. There is inequitable distribution of human resources within hospitals across countries, and many hospital managers lack adequate management training.

While many countries have started focusing on improving the quality of care, more than half of these countries have yet to establish a comprehensive plan. Capacity and commitment on the rational use of health technologies (medicines, biologicals, biomedical equipment, etc.), in terms of assessment, regulation and management are inadequate. Hospital information systems are weak in most countries with inadequate valid and comprehensive information on the sector. Hospital records are often not well maintained and more than half the countries in the Region do not use the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) for coding of diseases. E-health has not been given sufficient priority. In some countries affected by emergencies (e.g. Libya, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen) and in neighbouring countries, hospitals and the availability of hospital services have been seriously disrupted by conflict and war. In addition, a significant number of refugees and internally displaced people has also placed huge pressure on health systems. Comprehensive national emergency preparedness and response plans in most countries are insufficiently developed and, in the event of emergencies, inadequately implemented.

Transforming the hospital sector

Ensuring people-centred health services that offer universal access to quality services, social equity and financial protection, within a primary health care-led approach, is critical to achieving universal health coverage and the targets of the health-related Sustainable Development Goals. Hospitals are central to this ambitious agenda. Hospital transformation entails new ways of integrating hospital services within the broader service delivery system, communities and social services; improving hospital management and performance; and creating an enabling environment.

Transformation of the hospital sector and increasing the contribution of hospitals to achieving universal health coverage can be achieved through two complementary inter-related approaches: hospitals for integrated health systems and integrated health services within hospitals. These propose interventions at both system and facility levels:

- System level: (re)defining the position, roles and functions of hospitals, and setting clear objectives, thereby fostering a new health and social care model with an appropriate role for hospitals;
- Facility level: (re)organizing hospitals internally and optimizing their processes to strengthen internal performance and delivery of patient-centred care.

The paths to transformation should be adapted to country contexts at national and local levels, and different policy instruments might need to be used or will be adapted according to circumstance, and to specifically address the most pressing issues locally.

A few countries in the Region have already started implementation of hospital reforms and performance improvement projects as part of their national health strategies and/or health transformation plans. The impact of these plans needs to be carefully explored by other countries to learn from these experiences for their own future planning.

Way forward

WHO will continue to advocate for the strategic importance of hospitals within health systems in moving towards universal health coverage and identify key priorities to improve hospital care and management through enriching the data received from continuing situational analysis. WHO will convene an intercountry meeting to elicit the feedback of Member States to develop and finalize the strategic framework for action for its potential endorsement at the Sixty-sixth Session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean in 2019.

Expected outcomes

- Feedback elicited on the draft strategic framework for action for the hospital sector in the Region.
- Increased understanding of the strategic importance of hospitals within the health system in moving towards universal health coverage through WHO's integrated people-centred health services framework.