

Case Report

Health Sector Reform- Improving Health Care Delivery in Trinidad and Tobago

Agatha Carrington¹, Rehema Cox²

¹Assistant Professor/Programme Leader, ²Administrative Officer,
The University of Trinidad and Tobago

Corresponding Author: Agatha Carrington

Received: 24/11/2016

Revised: 14/12/2016

Accepted: 30/12/2016

ABSTRACT

The Health Sector Reform Symposium held on the 31st October 2013, sought to discuss past lessons and innovations in line with health sector reforms. It provided an opportunity for various players in the health sector to present, examine and discuss the research evidence that will guide the development of innovative strategies that are responsive to the needs and realities of the population being served.

The Symposium showcased research studies conducted by the University's students, graduates and faculty as well as other researchers and academics on key reform areas; provided a platform to lead the discourse on these reforms through the conduct of this Symposium and a commonplace for networking and building collaborations with national and regional partners.

The Symposium was an informative and educational event inspiring the participators to develop techniques of better Health Care.

Advancements in monitoring methods, patient care and systems reformation can allow for the development of emergency responses catering to the needs of the society.

Key Words: Health Sector Reform, Quality, Patient Care, Symposium

INTRODUCTION

In order to become globally competitive in the 21st century and create a robust economy that will support sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago, it is of paramount concern for the country to continuously ensure the health and well-being of the population.

Since the 1990s, reforms have been undertaken to restructure the governance and delivery of health services. Innovations in governance included the decentralization of healthcare delivery to five (5) semi-autonomous Regional Health Authorities, while the Ministry of Health retained its policy-making, strategic planning, financing and regulatory responsibilities. The overall

goal of these reforms is the improvement in the health status of the population by promoting and providing affordable quality healthcare in an efficient and equitable manner. The lessons and impacts of these reforms, however, have largely been left unexamined. Hence, there is a need to create an opportunity for a more in-depth understanding of the lessons and effects of these innovations in achieving the desired goal of improving health outcomes.

In this era of reforms, health administrators have a role to play in ensuring that the goals and objectives of the health reforms are achieved, while providing leadership in the implementation of innovative approaches in health. Towards

this end, health administrators need to take a closer look at successes and failures of reform initiatives so as to help chart the way forward.

The Symposium held on the 31st day in month of October 2013, highlighted past lessons and innovations in line with health sector reforms. It provided an opportunity for various players in the health sector to present, examine and discuss the research evidence that will guide the development of innovative strategies that are responsive to the needs and realities of the population being served. Further, the Symposium focused on strategic solutions which synthesized, will unlock the full value of healthcare innovations in a more systematic and deliberate manner. The country's growth and development will be influenced by national research that provides evidence for the development of sound national plans, policies and programmes.

The Symposium showcased research studies conducted by the University's students, graduates and faculty as well as other researchers and academics on key reform areas; provided a platform to lead the discourse on these reforms through the conduct of this Symposium and a commonplace for networking and building collaborations with national and regional partners.

Events Reports

Date of Event: October 31st 2013

Name of Event: Health Sector Reform

Location: Theatre 1, National Academy of the Performing Arts, Port of Spain

1) Brief outline of key issues and challenges addressed in the event

Several Health Sector presenters and University students gave presentations concerning some of the issues relating to this sector. Presentations were made concerning;

- i. Strengthening the Health Systems
- ii. Responding to Healthcare Priorities
- iii. Re-orienting Customer Service Delivery

iv. Improving Quality in Service Delivery

2) Key messages, outcomes, recommendations

- i. Varying ideas and methods of developing a sustainable framework were derived.
- ii. During sessions of the Question and Answers segment:
 - Informative discussions were held,
 - Some concerns of the audience were addressed.
- iii. The importance of patient care, quality and service delivery
- iv. Highlights some of the inconsistencies of the Health Sector
- v. Developing approaches of building bridges towards a more efficient and effective Health Sector Environment.

Summary of Proceedings

The Symposium began with a Welcome Address by Mrs. Agatha Carrington, Programme Administrator Masters in Health Administration. In her address she highlighted the importance of speaking on past lessons and innovations cognizant with health sector reforms. The aim of the event was to provide an opportunity for various players in the health sector to present, examine and discuss the research evidence that will guide the development of innovative strategies that are responsive to the needs and realities of the population being served. The symposium also aimed to showcase research studies conducted by the University's students, graduates and faculty as well as other researchers and academics on key reform areas.

Following Mrs. Carrington's speech was Dr. Bernadette Theodore-Gandi, Country Representative, PAHO, gave her greetings followed by Special Remark done by Dr. Fazal Ali, Provost UTT.

The Feature Presentation was done by Dr. Peter Kowlessar, a student of the Masters in Health Administration (MHA) Programme at The University of Trinidad

and Tobago. His presentation was titled: “Decentralization of Health care Delivery in Trinidad and Tobago”. Dr. Kowlessar in his Introduction gave a brief idea as to what comprises the Health Sector of Trinidad and Tobago. In his presentation Dr. Kowlessar spoke on Decentralization, highlighting the fact that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in 1992 decided there was a need for a Health Sector Reform Programme (HSRP). He further stated that the aim of the HSRP was to improve the health status of the population by promoting and providing affordable, quality healthcare in an efficient and equitable manner. He also defined it by saying “its definition implies the central authority attempting to move decision-making to the periphery. It entails distribution or dispersion of functions and powers from a central authority to a regional authority and there are three forms of decentralization:

- a. De-concentration
- b. Devolution
- c. Delegation.”

Dr. Kowlessar also pointed out that Decentralization in Latin America and the Caribbean has been an ongoing process for over twenty years.

Dr. Kowlessar also highlighted and discussed some of the issues with Decentralization in Trinidad and Tobago:

1. There were no enabling conditions provided by wider Public Sector Reform
2. Periods of political uncertainty and wavering political momentum for the project contributed significantly to the delays in project implementation
3. Flaws in the project design
4. Lack of support from the main union representing the majority of workers in the public health sector
5. The need for the Public Service Reform to support the Health Sector reform is to be considered as the transfer of all Public Health Sector employees was to be completed in 2008 and still yet to be

accomplished. In this regard, there was no Public Sector Reform.

6. Increasing public expectations is and will always be a factor in the fabric of healthcare. People have increasing comparative needs to what is delivered in North America and Europe. It was not realized and seems it may not be reachable because of the inappropriate funding for healthcare.
7. Political interference was considered but then rationalized, given the fact that when the RHAs do not perform, the negative publicity highlights the Ministry of Health as the cause to blame for any and all mishaps that will occur. So we actively observe the “interference” by the Ministry on the day-to-day operations of the RHAs.
8. Financing remains crucial to any properly managed organizations.
9. Lack of proper data collection

After having pointed out the issues with decentralization, Dr. Kowlessar then briefly gave solutions:

1. Proper assessment of cost of quality health service
2. Strengthening the role of the MoH
3. Development of a National Health Insurance System and other financial tools to help meet the health care cost for a basket for a basket of services, that would allow equitable access, regardless of the individual’s ability to pay.
4. Effective Human Resource systems and policies
5. Vaccinating the system from negative political interference.

He then concluded that the Health Sector Reform Programme (HSRP) in Trinidad and Tobago, continues by the process of devolution. The role of the MoH in this process must be strengthened, in addition, the necessary resources needed to allow the RHAs to fulfill their responsibilities and functions must be

provided. Nevertheless, they should be held accountable and regulations enforced. Political will must not waiver in the drive to

develop an equitable, quality and cost efficient healthcare system.

Action Plan for Health Sector Reform

Objective	Activity	Outcome	Timeline	Person Responsible
Provide technical leadership in health systems strengthening nationally and regionally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Host international conference on health systems strengthening biannually - Engage other partners in health sector reform dialogue - Participate in regional and international conferences on health systems 	Enhanced leadership role of UTT in health Systems strengthening in the country and the region	October 2014	MHA Team
Improve the visibility of the Masters in Health Administration (MHA) Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop the Terms of Reference (TOR) and seek approval for the establishment of a MHA alumni Association - Launch the MHA Alumni Association within the 1st quarter of 2014 - Implement a recruitment drive to enlist registration of past student into the MHA Alumni Association 	At least 90% of past students are registered by the end of 2014	January 2014 February 2014	Representatives of Graduates 2010-2013
Provide opportunities for the enhancement of leadership / management expertise in health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase the number of spaces available for prospective students - Develop and market short courses in leadership/management for health executives - Review curriculum to allow opportunities for matriculation into the MHA programme 	Increase in number of students expected to acquire skills in MHA programme and other training opportunities.	October 2013 ongoing	Programme Administrator and Team
Build collaboration with RHAs and other health agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop and formalize a system to facilitate communication of leadership/Management needs of the RHA - Seek opportunities for partnering with RHAs and other health agencies for sponsorship of students in each MHA cohort. - Establish a system for implementing action research in leadership/ management in RHAs and other health agencies - Develop a data bank for a cadre of Health Systems experts who could be sourced as consultants to assist RHAs and other health agencies 	Increase in the number of partnerships between Health Services Executives and the strategic leadership at RHAs and other health agencies		
Develop a system to enhance the transfer of knowledge into policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish a multi-sectoral committee to develop and implement a research agenda with an emphasis on Innovative leadership; Management of CNCDS - Network with health executives to develop best practice manuals/ protocols in management / leadership - Publish a quarterly journal on health care leadership and health service delivery. 	Increase in the uptake of knowledge to inform policy		Programme Administrator and Team

CONCLUSION

The Symposium was an informative and educational event inspiring the participators to develop techniques of better Health Care.

Advancements in monitoring methods, patient care and systems reformation can allow for the development of emergency responses catering to the needs and distresses of the society.

REFERENCES

- Inter-American Development Bank.IDB Country Strategy with Trinidad and Tobago: 2004-2007 [Internet]. 2001.

- Kolehmainen-Aitken R. Decentralization’s impact on the health work force: perspectives of managers, workers and national leaders [Internet]. 2004. Available from [www.human resources-health.com/content/2/1/5]
- Pan American Health Organization. Washington, D.C., USA. Pan American Health Organization Health Systems Profile- Trinidad and Tobago. 2008.
- Pan American Health Organization History of Health Sector Reform in Trinidad and Tobago-Overview, Issues and Challenges [Internet].2009. Available from [http://www.lachealthsys.org.]

- Paul R. Health Sector reform in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Rev Panam Salud Publica.1996;8 (p1-2) [http://vision2020.info.tt/cms/index.php?option=com_context&task=view&id=71&Itemid=80]
- Vision 2020. Vision 2020 Subcommittee on Health-Final Report Vol 1. Available from

How to cite this article: Carrington A, Cox R. Health sector reform- improving health care delivery in Trinidad and Tobago. Int J Health Sci Res. 2017; 7(1):344-348.

International Journal of Health Sciences & Research (IJHSR)

Publish your work in this journal

The International Journal of Health Sciences & Research is a multidisciplinary indexed open access double-blind peer-reviewed international journal that publishes original research articles from all areas of health sciences and allied branches. This monthly journal is characterised by rapid publication of reviews, original research and case reports across all the fields of health sciences. The details of journal are available on its official website (www.ijhsr.org).

Submit your manuscript by email: editor.ijhsr@gmail.com OR editor.ijhsr@yahoo.com