Institutionalizing Quality in Health Care of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: A Process of Sustaining Change

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Objective: This presentation would synthesize more than five years of experience in the design and implementation of quality management activities in a provincial setup for healthcare delivery.

Background: The Health Sector Reform Unit (HSRU) of Department of Health (DoH) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province initially developed and tried to implement standards for improving quality of healthcare services with partial success. Considerations were then given to make changes to the system in ways that permits it to better results. A conceptual and organizational framework was adopted for KP provincial healthcare systems to institutionalize efforts to provide quality healthcare with the support of German Technical Cooperation. This framework consists of eight essential elements and is being implemented in a phased process for institutionalization of QM.

Results: The KP health department has been able to develop quality policy and strategy, produced organizational structures for quality improvement, provide resources and continuously developing capacity of human resource for making the quality efforts and change sustainable. The IQHCS project (Improving Quality of Healthcare Services) is operational using government resources to improve more than 250 primary and secondary healthcare facilities.

Conclusions: It has been learnt that quality management institutionalization is an ongoing process. It is not a linear process and the essential elements may mature in a sequence or in a less coordinated fashion.

Key words: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Institutionalization, Health System, Quality Management

Background

Health systems and health care delivery in Khyber Paktunkhwa (KP) like other provinces in Pakistan is becoming more complex. Improving the performance of the health system is essential for efficient implementation of priority health programs. Increasingly complex healthcare system and rapidly escalating health care costs make it inevitable to develop quality management as an organized discipline to improve the quality of healthcare services in KP. Integration of quality management discipline with
the healthcare delivery system is likely to maximize the benefits of the system. Such system should focus on adopting evidence-based guidelines, giving attention to reducing medical errors, and safeguarding patient safety, and systematic approach called quality management to ensuring that the details of healthcare are done right. While adequate drug distribution, financing, human resources planning and allocation, and technical and professional training systems contribute to and are necessary for quality care in KP, quality management mechanism should also be in place to ensure that all processes work effectively and synchronously to achieve quality healthcare. However it should be kept in mind that having the capacity to carry out technical quality assurance activities does not ensure that QM is institutionalized within Pakistan’s health care delivery system or that QM functions are sustained over the long term. Therefore it is important to define a strategy so as how to establish and maintain QM as an integral and sustainable part of the KP health system woven into the fabric of daily activities and routine. The process of achieving this state is what this paper terms as “institutionalization.” QM institutionalization should occur at all organizational level—individual healthcare facilities, health networks, intermediate health system structures (such as district health units and systems), provincial Department of Health in KP. When QM would be institutionalized into the structure and functioning of a health system or organization, QM activities are consistently implemented and supported by an organizational culture of quality.

Keeping in view the features of the KP healthcare system and the barriers to the establishment of healthcare quality management system, it was important that the government takes the initiative of developing a strategic framework to improving the quality of care based on quality management approach and institutionalize quality in health care system of KP. This strategic framework forms a road map to create the capacity to plan, build, sustain and institutionalize efforts to produce quality healthcare. The term framework is used to refer to the essential elements and strategies KP healthcare system must have to institutionalize QM, technical activities to implement QM and dimensions of the quality of care to be provided. It was realized that many factors (or elements) affect the ability of a healthcare system at a micro level and an organization at micro level to institutionalize a change in the way work is approached. These elements were identified from quality management literature and grouped in three categories: enabling environment, organizing for quality and support functions as shown in Fig 1.
Fig 1: Essential Elements for Institutionalization of Quality Management

- **Internal Enabling Environment**
  - Policy
  - Leadership
  - Core Values
  - Resources

- **Organizing for Quality**
  - Structure

- **Support Functions**
  - Capacity Building
  - Information and communication
  - Rewarding Quality

Fig 2: Conceptual Model for Institutionalization of QM

- Policy
- Structure
- Values
- Resources

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Fig 2 shows the conceptual model for institutionalization of quality assurance. These three categories of elements for QM are represented as a series of overlapping concentric circles that work together. At the center is quality healthcare with nine dimensions, the desired outcome of QM. Surrounding the center is the triangle of core QM technical activities for improving the quality of care: defining quality (QD), measuring quality (MQ), and improving quality (QI). The impact of these core QM activities depends on an enabling environment that encourages a culture of quality and facilitates continued implementation of QA, an appropriate organizational structure for framing effective QM implementation, and the presence and adequacy of support functions. Developing a culture of quality requires initiating or strengthening each essential element. Each category of elements is important unto itself, but it is the combination of elements that facilitates and ensures institutionalization of QM. External environmental factors create both constraints and opportunities for assuring quality and institutionalizing QM.

**Organizing for quality:**

Institutionalization requires a clear delineation of roles, responsibilities, and accountability for the implementation of QM activities. We refer to this organization for implementing QM as the essential element, structure. However, in this context structure should not be equated with an organization chart or reporting relationships. Instead, it refers to the mapping out of responsibilities and accountability for QM in the organization, including oversight, coordination, and implementation of QM activities.

Institutionalization requires a clear delineation of roles, responsibilities, and accountability for the implementation of QM activities. Health is a devolved provincial subject in Pakistan so the different actions taken at the provincial level include

1. Strengthening of Health Sector Reform unit
2. Strengthening of Health Regulatory Authority
3. Setting up of the minimum or mandatory standards for health care facilities to operate in the market in consultation with all important stakeholders
4. Quality Collaborative Forum to guide and coordinate QM activities at the provincial level
5. Review the existing legislation, identify gaps, and coming up with a legal framework which would allow better regulation of healthcare sector.
6. Development of a mechanism to link the financing of public health care facilities with their quality
7. Working with Pakistan National Accreditation Council (PNAC) in adapting voluntary quality standards for the accreditation.

While it is sensible to have a provincial policy and develop provincial standards for both public and private health care, it is the task of staff in each sector to deliver the quality improvements. This requires a QM culture and approach to the delivery of health care. For the public sector this requires action at all levels. The District Health System in a province is ideally positioned to facilitate this local action, because it is close enough to the community to be responsive to their needs, and is a powerful vehicle for improving the quality of care. The Health Sector Reform Unit was able to get the PC-1 approved by the Government and in the process of implementation for improving the quality of primary, and secondary hospitals with the support of IQHCS Project (Improving Quality of Healthcare Services). The IQHCS project has established District Quality Improvement Teams under the supervision of EDO health with representation from the healthcare facilities. The responsible person(s) ensure that quality improvement teams are established within and/or amongst health facilities in the district and that all health professionals participate in the programmes of these teams. Guidance is provided to health facilities to establish these Facility Based Quality Teams (Service Improvement Teams) and programmes is designed to empower employees.

**The enabling environment:**

An environment conducive to initiating, expanding, and sustaining quality management is necessary to institutionalize QM. Such a supportive/facilitative environment is comprised of: (a) policies that support, guide, and reinforce QM; (b) leadership that sets priorities, promotes learning, and cares about its staff; (c) core organizational values that emphasize respect, quality, and continued improvement; and (d) adequate resources allocated for the implementation of QM activities. The full impact of the enabling environment is achieved only through the synergy created among all four of these elements.

**Policy**

The Health Sector Reform Unit has developed the quality policy for the province. This QA policy provides a framework and goals for the development of QM efforts. This quality policy defines the QM mandate and serves as a guide in the setting of objectives, allocation of resources, and implementation of activities to ensure quality healthcare.

**Steering & Stewardship**

Stewardship and steering in healthcare is a broad category that encompasses regulation, definition and modification of roles and responsibilities, and articulation of
values that shape the culture of the health sector. The formation of a Reform Unit, the Regulatory Authority and IQHCS (improving Quality of Healthcare Services Project) provide the stewardship role by

(a) Development and refinement of health legislation

(b) Technical analysis and regulation of health service delivery, certification and professional practice in health, and training and continuing education programs in the health sciences

(d) Establishment of basic standards for healthcare; development of quality assurance (voluntary standards) and accreditation programs for health service institutions, self regulation, and essential service package

The quality of care standards developed has been used to carry out external assessments of universal sample of hospitals in KP. Based on the results of these assessments the facility in charges are helped to identify the areas of improvement and given assistance in the form of technical assistance and seed money. In addition the process of self assessments and provision of tied grants for quality improvement has started in these facilities.

Leadership & organizational culture

Leadership - having a vision and the ability to generate commitment to that vision - is the key to institutionalizing QM in a health system/organization. Leadership for QM is both necessary to begin and sustain institutionalization and an evolving part of the institutionalization process at both the national/policy and operational levels. Therefore in KP the strategy to institutionalize QM address leadership and organizational culture to change the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of health sector leaders and providers. Strategies range from providing needed skills to managers so they can better serve in a rapidly changing environment to public information campaigns that educate consumers about their rights and responsibilities. While leadership can impact on all the determinants of care, careful consideration is being paid to staff motivation, staff competency, and community determinants when analyzing options for quality-oriented health sector reform.

Resources

The resources necessary to optimize quality (within the fiscal constraints of the organization) also play vital role. Although allocation of some resources for QM is essential for its institutionalization, it is how the organizational leaders make use of these resources—rather than the level of resources—that drives the institutionalization process. The process of capacity building of the hospital managers in optimal utilization
of available resources has been started. The approval of KP PC-1 committing the province’s own resources for QM activities by incorporating funding for QM into operating budgets is a key milestone on the road to institutionalization.

Support functions:

Several essential elements are needed to support sustained implementation of QM and improved quality of care. Three critical support functions are: (a) capacity building in QM, such as training, supervision, and coaching for healthcare providers and managers; (b) information and communication for the purposes of sharing, learning, and advocating for quality; and (c) rewarding and recognizing individual and team efforts to improve quality.

Capacity building

Focus is also placed on capacity building as it plays a very important role in facilitating the institutionalization of QM by ensuring knowledge and skill development in the technical implementation (standards development, process improvement, etc.) and management (leadership, planning, monitoring, etc.) of QM activities. This is to ensure that competent health professionals are available to assure quality in health care and to continuously improve the care that is being provided. A two weeks course on QM with the collaboration of Heidelberg University is developed and is being delivered with the help of Health Services Academy.

Rewarding quality

Recognizing and rewarding quality are one of the two most effective ways to motivate health staff and managers to continue and persevere in their efforts to meet client needs in the most effective and efficient manner in KP health system. The goal of institutionalizing the element of rewarding quality is to create an organizational culture where efforts to improve or assure quality are recognized, appreciated, and re-warded and where staff take pride in the quality of their work. While performance-based salary increases, bonuses, and other compensatory benefits are important to explore, the financial realities of the health system means that salary incentives can form only a part of a larger motivational strategy. A quality-oriented approach in KP is broadened to include the range of options like intangible rewards such as prestige, and pride in excellence like the best performer award, best facility awards.