

Better Public Sector Hospitals: Need of the Hour

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The public sector hospitals face many problems especially in the third world countries. Some of these problems directly relate to the prevailing systems of the Government and the society rather than to the hospitals per se. As institutions are made by men and not by cement and bricks, the performance of the institutions directly relate to the quality of the men.. The fundamental question is: whether country is producing quality men? If not then not only hospitals but all institutions will suffer. Quality of the men does not mean only knowledge or degree they possess but their integrity, faith, character, commitment, courage, strength, spirit, zeal, hard work and right temperament. It's referred to the final Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h that near the last days there will be less men than women. Some scholars have related this to manly characters & not to gender as just outlined. There will be many phenotypically males but they would lack the "manly" characteristics. If country is not producing people with manly characteristics one will not find enough people to run the institutions. Therefore we must pay attention to the nurseries, primary schools, secondary schools before we expect good breed of people reaching to the higher education.

Problems in public sector emanate from killing of merit in appointments & promotions and lack of accountability. Dishonest and incompetent administrators are running the show who recruit substandard staff and equipments. Dishonest and incompetent administrators are impotent to show the exit door to the inefficient and dishonest subordinates. A culture of kick backs and commissions prevail everywhere. Many Government hospitals are full of unused equipments, some of which are not even taken out of the original packings for years. Similarly many public sector hospitals are house of inefficient, lazy, work shy, dishonest and dull workers. This clearly shows diseased and sickening atmosphere. Of course all is not bad but Government hospitals are working at less than 20% efficiency. How to overcome this pathetic situation?

Our suggestions to improve the situation are as follows;

1. Implement excellent tried and tested proven management tools of hiring, firing, accountability and promotion from the best institutions of the world. Do not accept nepotism and always check the references by calling previous job places to track past performance, behavior and assess the honesty, integrity and work commitment. Written and practical tests may also be given to the prospective employees. Only the best candidates should be selected.
2. Responsibility without authority is a sign of sick administration. We must select best people strictly based on merit and give them required authority to accomplish the tasks. Pennywise pound foolish strategies must be abandoned. Adequate infrastructure and support personnel must be provided by cutting down the numbers of lazy, unused staff.
3. Keep the exit door wide open. Put in place the biometrics system for punctuality. Have weekly electronic assessment of employee performance rather than yearly ACR system. If someone is not performing show him the exit door after 2-3 warnings in a month time. If someone is performing above average he should be recognized and rewarded.
4. Install appointment system. Imagine a patient is in line since 8:00 to be seen by a physician at 11:00 in OPD. Why appointment of 11 could not be given to him? If proper appointment system is implemented the fish market atmosphere will vanish and doctors will be able to examine the patients in more relaxed atmosphere. A nominal fee should be charged from patients and given a plastic card with embossed patient details such as name, date of birth and NID #.
5. Lot of medicines are stolen from Government hospitals and sold to the private medical stores. Similarly blood is stolen and sold to private hospitals; at times infected one. Firing incompetent and dishonest employees must be made easy and the courts must not grant stay orders. For this purpose judges must be selected on honesty and competency and they must be

given refresher courses on ethics, Islamic jurisprudence. Hardworking and honest employees must be promoted and encouraged.

6. Doctors should be given solid training in good management and teaching methodology during their undergraduate training. And this training should be reinforced and solidified. Having separate administrator is no solution as most of the time these degrees are worthless and even if they are of good quality, the person due to lack of higher education lacks the vision and experience of day o day teaching and patient care problems. A properly qualified and trained honest consultant will have much better vision. Most of the so called administrators in public hospitals are corrupt and feed upon patients' food, hospital vehicles and other resources.
7. Research degree holders must not be given the responsibilities in which they have no accredited training. PhD for example is a research degree and revolves around one laser sharp focused topic. The possessor of this degree has no knowledge and training in the entire field e.g. hematology, chemical pathology or histopathology. Unless person has another accredited training based qualification possessor of this degree alone must not be assigned the responsibility of patient care of the entire field as this will lead to disaster for obvious reasons.
8. The promotion must not be based on the criteria of "papers published" alone. As a matter of fact this requirement may not be essential. As some very good physicians and teachers have no inclination, time or energy to do the quality research. This requirement has resulted in much substandard and bogus research. Teaching hospitals need good teachers, good patient care providers and good researchers. Therefore two of three may be sufficient for promotion. Of course good quality research must get a positive recognition but it must not be the essential ingredient. On the other hand bogus and substandard research should have no recognition.
9. Strict accountability of all equipments and their performance and consumables be made on quarterly basis. Companies involved in corruption must be nationwide black listed. Their owners must also be blacklisted. On job training and improvements in all fields must be carried out for all employees.
10. Incidence reports, corrective measures and overall quality management must be strictly followed. Regular feedback of students, postgraduate residents and patients should be obtained and be used as one of the evaluation tool for the consultants. There should be a system of perpetual moral and ethical enhancements for all employees.
11. Hospital infection control system must be very vigilant. Infection control committee's performance must also be monitored. Infection Control Committee can substantially bring down the frequency and severity of the nosocomial infections and protect valuables resources.
12. Morbidity and mortality investigation should be regularly held documenting all shortcomings and corrective actions.
13. Promotion policy should be improved incorporating merit, time scale and PMDC rules. Due to present faulty promotion policy a significant number of good doctors go abroad for better carrier and reward. For the same reasons doctors from Azad Kashmir leave for different cities of Pakistan. These doctors can be brought back through better service structure and good incentives!
14. Hospital care services should be improved by establishing various departments having proper staff and infrastructure according to international standards. For example department of medicine should have senior and junior consultants, residents and/or medical officers, adequately trained clerical other supportive staff. Proper maintenance department should be established having engineers and technicians to keep electro medical equipment functioning.

We again emphasize that all staff must be selected on merit based on well established international standards and their constant grooming and growth on job place must be assured.

These are some suggestions for improvement in working of public sector hospitals. We hope concerned authorities will take note of these and we also trust that entire medical community will actively participate in improving the working of Government hospitals..