

Zambia's Hospital Accreditation Program Yields Important Lessons

Summary

Zambia's recently developed hospital accreditation program is a major component of ongoing health sector reforms that have taken place in the country during the last decade. Although Zambia previously had several processes in place for evaluating hospital performance, comprehensive performance standards had not been developed and quality measurement was not standardized. Zambia's hospital accreditation program has focused on developing realistic standards, educating hospitals on their performance vis-à-vis these standards, and making decisions on whether hospital have achieved accreditation status. The accreditation program has been lauded as an improvement over punitive hospital inspection policies.

Introduction

Zambia developed a national hospital accreditation program, one of the first of its kind in Sub-Saharan Africa, in 1997, following a 1996 study revealing numerous deficiencies in Zambian health facilities. The Quality Assurance Project conducted an assessment of the program in mid-2000 in an effort to document and share with international health professionals the major milestones and challenges the accreditation program faced during the first three years of its inception. In mid-2000, QAP assembled a research team comprised of representatives from the Joint Commission Resources (JCR) and the Center for Human Services (CHS). This team joined a Zambian colleague from Zambia's Central Board of Health (CBoH) to review relevant documents and budgets, interview numerous policy-makers and stakeholders (including hospital personnel and patients), and examine hospital accreditation survey data collected in Zambia. The objective of this research was to document the development of the Zambian hospital accreditation program from 1997 onward and highlight the major milestones, important players, and sequence of events involved in the ongoing development of Zambia's program.

Methodology

The data for the study were collected in two ways: (1) through a review and analysis of written documentation, and (2) through a field visit to Zambia in May/June of 2000 to interview major stakeholders in the accreditation program. Documentation reviewed for this study included: quarterly and annual reports, survey results, communication between the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Zambia Ministry of Health regarding the program's development, correspondence between the CBoH and Zambian hospitals, newspaper articles, and Zambian health policy documents. Interviews and focus groups were conducted during the field visit using structured guides. These guides included structured, semi-structured, and open-ended questions. Focus group discussions were completed with the following stakeholders: the Zambian Health Accreditation Council (ZHAC); surveyors; hospital management boards of four Zambian districts; management and administrative staff of four hospitals; and members of the public (outpatients and inpatients at four hospital sites). Interviews were conducted with representatives of international agencies involved in Zambia's accreditation program and representatives from three divisions of the CBoH.



Results

The researchers found that Zambia's hospital accreditation program has achieved 10 major milestones to date (see Table 1).

Table 1: Chronology of Major Milestones in the Development of the Zambian Hospital Accreditation Program, as of First Quarter 2000

Major Milestones	1997	1998	1999	2000
1. Recognizing the need to improve quality and choosing accreditation as an approach to address the need	→			
2. Choosing the appropriate accreditation model to implement and making minor adaptations	→			
3. Setting up the formal structure to advise, operate, and manage the accreditation program	→	→		
4. Developing and testing the survey process and standards to be used	→	→		
5. Recruiting, hiring, and training surveyors		→	→	→
6. Conducting educational campaigns and consultative surveys		→	→	→
7. Refining rules, policies, and procedures for accreditation		→	→	→
8. Developing the accreditation database format			→	→
9. Conducting accreditation decision surveys				→
10. Interpreting survey data and making accreditation decisions				→

The research also revealed that Zambia's accreditation program is at a critical juncture and urgently needs to resolve several important issues if it is to achieve long-term success. These issues include: finalizing an accreditation manual for Zambian hospitals; helping the Zambian Health Accreditation Council achieve legal status; communicating the results of the first round of accreditation surveys; and determining how to assist hospitals that do not achieve accreditation status.

Conclusion

Because Zambia's hospital accreditation program has been funded primarily through USAID during its first three years, developing a long-term plan for financial viability is imperative. Therefore, finding alternative funding sources, such as financial support from the MOH and the CBoH, as well as partial or complete payment of survey fees by the individual hospitals participating in the accreditation process is crucial to the program's future. Now in its fourth year, the Zambian program has met and overcome many hurdles and can be viewed as a pioneering activity that deserves careful scrutiny from other countries interested in improving the quality of their hospital care. The next few years will test the creativity and resiliency of Zambia's program and QAP will continue to monitor and document the progress of this seminal program.

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This summary is based on the *Operations Research Results* document, "Setting up a National Hospital Accreditation Program: The Zambian Experience," written by Ngoyi Bukonda, Hany Abdallah, Joyce Tembo (QAP), and Karin Jay (JCI). To order the *Operations Research Results* on which these findings are based, please access our Website: www.qaproject.org, or write to qapdissem@urc-chs.com.