

Innovation in health processes: a current and exciting challenge

A few weeks ago I found myself having to use the emergency services of a large hospital, luckily for reasons that turned out to be nothing serious. While waiting to be seen, my mind wandered to the last time I had been in an emergency room, and I could note a huge difference. The facilities had been enlarged, remodeled and equipped with an automatic system that assigns patients to an area, cubicle and responsible physician. Each cubicle has sophisticated instruments for monitoring key vital signs while ensuring patient privacy. It also has its own equipment to perform certain diagnostic tests that previously involved the involvement of other hospital services.

However, the work procedures have hardly changed: the nursing staff still takes notes on the same checklist, physicians write out the diagnostic test results and scribbled their prescriptions and treatments and, most importantly, there is still that case folder where all documents are filed. The main change is a new post involving keying in certain types of information highlighted by professionals into the associated data system.

This real case scenario is a true reflection of the evolution and current status of health care in our country. In recent years there has been a strong and decisive move by all health care providers in favor of technologies, with annual investment in ICT in the order of 1%. This is still far from the average in OECD and EU countries, which ranges between 2% and 3%, and other sectors such as retail (5%), telecommunications (7%) and banking (10%). These investments have been allocated primarily to providing basic infrastructure facilities and implementation of operational management systems (primary care, drug prescription, HIS, finance, etc.)

Currently the sector is facing the huge challenge of improving, optimizing and innovating in its processes (management, clinical care, clinical diagnosis support, care support and backup services). This involves properly and strategically defining change in a participatory and consensual manner, realistically planning, communicating and monitoring change while taking into account all possible impacts and risks. It also involves an effective management and implementation of change in all sector agents, in operational models as well as in management/control, organizational, and finance models.

There are some great pros that facilitate and foster this change. There is a need to meet the rising demand for services driven by the growth and aging of the population and the new health coverage. And there is also a need to ensure economic sustainability and address the shortage of health professionals (doctors and nurses).

Innovation plays an important role to improve operational models, using new techniques and technologies that enable greater accessibility, effectiveness, efficiency, interoperability and spending sustainability. The purpose for all this, of course, is to provide patients with more thorough service, bolster the effectiveness of care services, rein in health care costs and ultimately improve the health of the general population.

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