

# Continuous Quality Improvement & Return on Investment



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From the first wheel to the latest iPhone, quality improvement practices have been central to human development. Quality improvement initiatives have been shown to reflect positively on return on investments through the implementation of various steps, and are a central aspect in healthcare organizations operation and delivery (Weeks, 2002).

## Quality Improvement

Quality improvement initiatives are defined as everyday activities executed within an organization as an attempt to enhance its ability to meet customers demand; Steps to identify evidence based quality improvement are outlined by understanding the current processes at place, costs and outcomes of certain activities in order to identify the areas in need for improvement so that they are set to be piloted in order to recognize the most effective and efficient quality improvement intervention to be taken (Weeks, 2002).

## Investing in Quality

**Quality improvement activities are translated by the ability to continuously reduce waste, reduce response time, simplify the design of services and processes, and subsequently, improving quality in order to work more effectively and efficiently; therefore, indicating a return on investment.** According to Kumar et.al (2009) there has been a recorded increase in profit margins from the implementation of effectiveness and efficiency concepts as

a result of quality improvement on the global front. Feazell & Marren (2003) stated that added use of information technology has been seen as helpful in the management of patient records. For example, as the patient's medical history and all needed test and medication data are available online at the time which a physician makes a diagnostic or treatment decision, quality would surely improve. Additionally, the increased use of computerized decision support systems would also advance the quality of service provided to the patient.

## Realizing Quality Improvement

Healthcare organizations operate within a context of constrained resources, equipment and money, all of which having a high chance of opportunity cost. Consequently, quality improvement is a challenge and change is seen expensive. Woodward-Hagg, et al. (2008) stated that healthcare professionals are often unfamiliar with economic evaluation techniques for quality improvement projects. The leadership of healthcare organizations plays an essential role in implementing quality improvement activities, and thus their consideration that quality improvement generates revenue rather than just being an overhead. Understanding the impact of quality management on an organization's performance is an ongoing concern for managers, since quality procedures have reflected to reduce product cost and positively impact organization performance (Foster, 2007; Kumar et. al 2009).

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## Standardizing Quality Investment

Healthcare organizations plan and implement quality improvement initiatives under the auspices of accrediting bodies, which are the evaluative authority of hospital performances, thus; healthcare organizations are constantly subjected by such entities to improve the quality of care that they provide (Swensen et. al, 2013).

In Lebanon, the introduction of an accreditation system for hospitals was initially introduced in 1962. It was later amended in 1983 and 2000, and revised further in years 2001 and 2004. In 2000, the Ministry of Public Health in Lebanon introduced a new hospital accreditation paradigm that aims at creating incentives for continuous quality improvement by developing an external evaluation system based on scientific processes (Ammar, Wakim & Hajj, 2007). Currently, the accreditation standards are being revised. On a regional scale, quality of care has also been transformed as a priority in health policy agendas of governments with respect to patient safety and evaluation of professional practice.

## Current Quality Investment in Lebanon

Quality improvement initiatives are not always directed towards the real need for improvement. For example, purchasing expensive medical equipment without conducting any feasibility studies to justify the need to purchase is considered to be quality improvement; in turn this would cause a negative perception on quality improvement initiatives for hospital decision makers when their investments go south.

Although the Lebanese Ministry of Health accreditation states that hospitals should implement continuous quality improvement, there exists bantam follow up of such implementation and any assessment of its success.

## Conclusion

In times of increased competition and scare resources,



quality improvement initiatives provide a competitive edge in the healthcare industry. Nowadays, customer satisfaction is vital to maintain, technologies and innovations are constantly enhancing services, products and processes. Therefore, hospital decision makers contemplating opportunities for quality improvement activities need to realize the potential financial impact and return of evidence based quality improvement planning, along with the prospective and recognized value. On a national level there is a need to implement more Ministry of Public Health supervision over hospitals quality improvement implementation.

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