Letter to the Editor

The use of the audit method in assessing the performance of the public health system

Ionel Bostan*, Ioan Hurjui, Elena Hlaciuc, Veronica Grosu, Marius Ciubotariu

A specific feature of the Romanian healthcare system is that most services are provided directly in hospitals, and this segment is rather augmented, while the services provided in the community amount to a quantity that is well below the real needs. This state generated high costs on a national level (inefficiency) and contradict the results and the recommendations of certain valuable research studies conducted on an international level [1-8].

Healthcare is mainly funded from public funds, and about 85% of these funds are provided through the budget of the Unified National Fund of Social Security and Healthcare (FUNASS), supplemented by the amounts received from the state budget and the state social security budget, as well as by the personal income of the population [9, 10]. The state budget is responsible for financing certain specific objectives that are not covered by the insurance system [11] national interest healthcare programmes, constructions and rehabilitation in the medical system, endowment with state-of-the-art equipment or payments for underprivileged groups that are not included in the social security system. If we take into account the research conducted by certain international bodies [12], we shall notice that the healthcare expenses are under $1 000 (at the purchase par value) per capita, thus placing Romania on the second to last place in Europe (above Albania and Macedonia). This limited spending causes an increased number of malpractice cases derived directly from insufficient funding including but not only: nosocomial infections, using unproper medical devices and even surgical instruments, a significantly decreased number of physicians and nurses per capita, and so on. All these increase the morbidity, mortality, and malpractice claims that have to be solved by the Romanian College Board but also by the medical legal system. This increased burden on the medical legal system causes blockages in the analysis of “purely” medical legal cases, increasing the time from receiving a case until solving it, therefore causing in turn obstructions in criminal investigations. Often proper auditing may determine possible ways of optimising the use of the limited funds from the healthcare system, therefore, possibly, decreasing the number of malpractice cases and indirectly optimise the workflow of the medical legal system. In this letter we would like to present the conclusions of such an audit, obtained after a research focused on the period 2010-2012, on the following National Health Programmes (NHP): (1) oncology, (2) HIV treatment, (3) transplant, and (4) Cardiovascular diseases.

The formulated recommendations mainly consisted of:

(a) adjusting the specific legal standards of NHP1-4 to the requirements related to the completion of the objectives, so as to ensure the efficient use of the resources and the introduction of more relevant indicators;

(b) justifying the NHP1-4 budget, by taking into account both the approved physical and the efficiency indicators as well as the level of the debts recorded during the previous year;

(c) centralised application, on a national level, of the procurement procedures for the medication used in the therapies included in the NHP1-4;

(d) appropriately checking and monitoring the subordinate territorial units, as concerns the use of the allocated funds, according to the established purposes; including certain control activities in the annual monitoring plan and conducting such check-ups with the suppliers/providers that helped develop the NHP1-4.

Doctoral School of Economics, Stefan cel Mare University, Street Universității 13, 720229 Suceava, Romania
* Corresponding author: PhD, Law, Email: ionel_bostan@yahoo.com
Moreover, these recommendations were also accompanied by the need to assess and analyse the dynamics of the physical and efficiency indicators related to the development of NHP1-4 in order to enable the measuring of the actual funding needs related to each of these programmes.

In conclusion, apart from being an independent evaluation of the economic, efficient and effective way a system (an activity or a public entity) works, performance audit is also meant to identify certain weaknesses and to recommend ways to significantly improve the financial management of public funds in terms of saving, better operating procedures, avoiding waste and completing the objectives set by the audited entity in a more efficient and economic way as far as costs are concerned.

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References