Technical support in strengthening the quality assurance framework in the Republic of Moldova

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ABSTRACT

The world continues to battle an unprecedented combination of an economic crisis coupled with a public health emergency brought on by the SARS- CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic that has resulted in significant global cross-border disruptions with repercussions for healthcare quality assurance.

Quality assurance refers to the systematic efforts that are required to effectively safeguard the seamless and non-disruptive delivery of healthcare goods and services. This encompasses reliable delivery, management of expectations, maximisation of resources and ensuring that quality of service is maintained even in the face of global service disruptions caused by COVID-19.

In this national strategy, the World Health Organization team from Moldova presents evidence of best and sustainable practice that looks at how to strengthen the quality assurance framework and it implementation in the Republic of Moldova.

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Moldova is facing the COVID-19 pandemic while being in a very active health reform process, combined with an economic crisis. In this challenging environment and ambitious agenda, health and the quality of health services are high on the priority list for both national stakeholders and international development partners. In 2021, following organizational changes in the Government, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection was reorganized and divided into the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labour

and Social Protection, which requires substantial technical guidance and support to consolidate the central health authority. Therefore, the World Health Organization has been prompt in supporting the system strengthening efforts, including in health system quality assurance, updating regulatory framework, and designing the new National Authority for Evaluation and Accreditation in Health functional infrastructure.

DESCRIPTION OF BEST PRACTICE

The national legal framework of the Republic of Moldova creates an overarching vision for universal access to high quality health services with a focus on patient rights. The National Health Policy (2007–2021) and Healthcare System Development Strategy (2008–2017) stipulate specific actions on development and implementation of a system to improve the quality of healthcare services, and regulate and monitor this quality. The existing health legal framework has a quality management system (QMS) embedded in all its components to ensure patient safety. Establishment of the mandatory health insurance system (Law 1585- XIII/1998) allowed for changes to the health financing mechanisms and gave more financial flexibility to healthcare facilities. It has addressed a critical dimension of quality in health by increasing access to care, setting standards of services, mechanisms of standard assurance and monitoring. Historically, quality assurance was the responsibility of numerous authorities, and currently (laws nr. 552/2001, 191/2018) the authority responsible for evaluation and accreditation in health is the National Agency for Public Health (NAPH) of the MoH. In August 2021 the Government decided (GD 148/2021) to reorganize the MoH and revise its functionality regarding quality assurance through NAPH and at all levels. To ensure NAPH's efficient functionality, and to improve health service quality, proper evaluation and due accreditation of healthcare facilities, MoH has set the goal to create the National Health Evaluation and Accreditation Authority as an independent agency in the new Government Plan of Actions. Many normative acts prescribe technical solutions to improve clinical effectiveness, i.e. national clinical protocols, indicators and internal clinical audits, and place responsibility for implementation on institutional committees. Altogether, the above-mentioned normative elements create the regulatory system for health quality assurance.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

Organization, decision-making and management for quality

The healthcare quality management system is a set of activities implemented by national and subnational (technical) institutions responsible for quality assurance, based on system-generated evidence collected routinely by an impartial institution or in collaboration with international partners. A comprehensive system-based evaluation reflected in the "Quality and safety of health care in the Republic of Moldova" Report by Charles D. Shaw (2015),[2] emphasized that many policies, structures and methods for quality management and assurance, common to other countries, have been initiated in Moldova over a decade. The monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for this quality framework implementation are underdeveloped and hinders impact measurement for further improvements.

The QMS in the country is implemented through an infrastructure, which includes MoH with its Specialty Commission and the Council of Experts setting the policy and regulatory framework and approving standards for quality. National technical institutions, including NAPH, the Agency for Medicines and Medical Devices, the National Health Insurance Company show a scattered distribution of functionalities for quality standards development, quality assurance and compliance monitoring and management. The NAPH with two directions: on health services quality management and on authorization and accreditation in health is responsible for standards development, evaluation, and accreditation of healthcare facilities. NAPH is also the national provider of a range of public health services, including laboratory diagnostics. The affiliation of quality assurance functionality to a technical institution involved in health service delivery creates challenges in proper QMS implementation. Insufficient authority, autonomy, and capacities of the existing infrastructure have justified the MoH's intention to develop an independent authority that would aggregate the main functionality required for a strong quality management and assurance system.

SUSTAINABILITY OF BEST PRACTICE

Opportunities for improvement and provided technical assistance.

Thorough analysis of the existing regulatory framework pertinent to QMS in Moldovan healthcare setting is required and will be followed by a comparative analysis with other regional states, bringing in relevant practices, including in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. Routine quality assurance and regulatory framework practices along with those observed during the public health emergency would create solid evidence for justification of a proposed new national infrastructure. This amount of systematized background information will be thoroughly discussed during the policy dialogue process to fine tune the developed set of interventions and structure of the National Authority for Evaluation and Accreditation in Health. Creating a favourable environment for strengthening the QMS in Moldova as a component of the health system reforms is a crucial objective for further area development. Medical, social, ethical, and economic dimensions for evidence generation, combined with new approaches, such as health technology assessment and implementation for continuous quality improvement, should be embedded in all practices for informed decision making towards high quality assurance of health services. The vision of improving the functionality of the NAPH by its reorganization, revision of functions and responsibilities, as well as its human and financial resources, requires the evaluation and accreditation unit to stand autonomously in support of all new changes in the system. It can also allow the ideals of patient centered care to be central to a national health strategy. There is a favourable political context to advocate for promotion of the quality-of-care topic at the national level, and we at WHO stand ready to continue providing the required range of technical assistance to the national health system partners.

Keywords: Technical support, quality assurance framework, SARS-CoV-2, Moldova

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