

The challenges and opportunities for healthcare services in the future

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CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR HEALTH CARE SERVICES IN THE

FUTURE By Location Introduction One of the keybasics of a happy life is being in a good health. Good health is one of the ultimate blessings that money cannot buy. Man has sought this blessing and health care since the dawn of history. Today, health care services play a significant role in achieving a better health for all humans in any society. Health care services provide people with a broad range of facilities such as diagnosis, treatments, prevention of diseases, and other physical and mental impairments in humans. Healthcare aims to health promotion and disease prevention, provide first aid services to all sick or injured people, provide programs for the prevention and control of communicable diseases, control of endemic diseases, and offer generic medical advice¹.

However, health care services are facedwith many challenges presented by demographic and economic pressures. On the objective side, many opportunities can help healthcare services to develop and improve. Health care was and will continue to be one of the important sources in promoting the physical health and the wellbeing of people all over the world. However, with the advent of numerous healthcare changes, the sector of healthcare as well as the people who are working in healthcare service is continually presented with many challenges and the opportunities. This paper will discuss in detail the challenges and the opportunities for health care services in the future. It will have a deeper look at three main topics: technology and research, people and chronic disease, and working environment. It will address the challenges and the opportunities in each of these topics².

People and chronic diseases

Food habits

The world health organization has focused on establishing factors that contribute to the high prevalence of chronic diseases in their recent past. According to WHO, food determinants are a critical determinant of the health of any individual. An increased consumption of fast foods and a high preference for unhealthy foods has contributed to the soaring occurrences of chronic diseases. Diseases such as cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure and liver and kidney diseases are attributable to an unhealthy eating pattern. The need for adoption of healthy eating patterns cannot be over emphasized³. Food habits have a direct correlation to the body mass index which is a reflection of one's susceptibility to chronic diseases⁴. This is to say that, people with poor eating habits register high BMIs, high cholesterol levels and are susceptible to obesity. If such trends persist then the future will present a higher prevalence of chronic diseases.

Increase in life threatening diseases

Another challenge that arises in the future of healthcare is the increase in the occurrence of life threatening diseases. Under the assumption that these diseases continue with similar trends into the future, predictions can be made to calculate the occurrence of such diseases.

According to WHO, cardiovascular diseases, which includes both Ischaemic heart disease and strokes, are the leading causes of death in the world. With an increase in the prevalence of a disease, the cost directed towards it increases as well. This is a rising challenge. In the United States, between the years of 2010 to 2030, the total medical costs related to cardiovascular diseases are said to triple from 272.5 billion USD to 818.1 billion USD. Such

huge changes in prevalence and costs towards disease could prove extremely challenging for health professionals. Malignant neoplasm and cancer rank among the top ten leading causes of death in the world. Chemicals that cause cancer are known as carcinogens. Around 24 chemicals, including tobacco and asbestos have been recognized as carcinogenic. This is however, a small number, and scientists have not yet tested all chemicals for carcinogenesis.

This is a challenge as it is difficult to predict the future increase of such carcinogens and to prevent the prolonged exposure to the human population. However, this is also an opportunity for health professionals in the future. Epidemiological studies and laboratory tests on animals are under way currently to determine which chemicals are carcinogenic and which ones are not. The knowledge of these chemicals will allow minimizing the exposure of humans to these elements, thereby reducing the risk of cancer.

Geriatrics is a rising field for healthcare professionals in terms of both opportunities and challenges. The proportion of the elderly in the society is growing as life expectancy is prolonged due to the increase in health care facilities and treatments. As the percentage of elderly grow, the amount of time spent by healthcare professionals treating them increases as well⁵.

There will be a rising demand in health professionals with a special set of skills and training in geriatrics.

The current health professional student population will be impacted the most in this process. Taking care of the elderly can also be extremely challenging, as the biological, psychological, and social changes associated with aging must be taken into account.

" Antibiotic therapy, if indiscriminately used, may turn out to be a medicinal flood that temporarily cleans and heals, but ultimately destroys life itself."

This quote by Felix Marti-Ibanez describes the challenges arising from the overconsumption of antibiotics. From an evolutionary perspective, the prevention of antimicrobial resistance is unattainable. The increase in new antibiotics and the emergence of new treatments could present itself as a huge challenge as it produces new problems⁶. In the case of chemotherapy used for cancer, treatment has led to the development of new communicable diseases and vulnerable hosts. However, this problem could be used as an opportunity to educate physicians and clinicians in different countries regarding the problems caused by the overconsumption of antibiotics. Healthcare regulation in the prescription and use of antibiotics could be an opportunity to regulate the usage. Policies in the future should be firmly placed to reduce antimicrobial resistance which state that clinicians should only prescribe antibiotics to patients with bacterial infection.

One of the most difficult challenges that a healthcare worker faces today is the constant struggle of maintaining a positive, enthusiastic attitude towards not only their job, but also the patients they care for. With the belief somehow instilled in students that creating a distance from patients will somehow protect their own emotions as it is time-consuming and physically draining to be involved in a very emotional situation. Research has indicated that physicians are likely to adopt a detached stance when dealing with patients in a bid to avoid the emotional turmoil that may result when one relates to the patients feelings. Such detachments help the physician cope with the situation and make critical decision with the desired sobriety.

This could be seen as a massive challenge facing the healthcare service in the future. Physicians who develop the rare skill of extending empathy to deserving patients because of their current situations contribute positively to fastening their recovery. Such emotional support from a physician helps the patient cope with anger and high levels of frustrations associated with sickness. By creating that distance and compartmentalizing grief, physicians put themselves at risk for a misjudgment of patient treatment⁷. A focus on objectivity and evidence rather than care for the patient as a whole could also be on the increase in physicians in the future, leading to a disconnect between the patients and their supposed careers. A close analysis of the factors considered by patients when choosing the most appropriate physician reveals that both clinical expertise and certain personality attributes are a priority. One of such attributes is exhibiting a humane attitude towards patients.

The impact on the healthcare services due to the economic recession could pose a substantial challenge to future physicians and careers. The Ireland's health, economic crisis is adversely affected by the privatization of health centers and poverty. All of these are challenges that the Irish Health care system faces currently and will continue to face during the coming years. The strains of the financial crisis will not only be seen through reduced budgets and cutbacks, but also through the health of the patients. With the financial strain, continuing to be a primary problem for many patients, the amount of patients that are to be seen by doctors will decline. Some patients may forego preventative necessary care because they would be unable to pay the costs required. With patients foregoing their necessary

care, an increased number of chronic diseases may become developed in a larger proportion of the population. This leads to a more difficult job for physicians and could place a larger strain on the healthcare services in Ireland. Stress related diseases may also be seen more regularly in the population as a secondary effect of the economic crisis, another challenge for the future physicians and carers. For physicians and health care providers, to have a successful and stressfree career, they need to have a good rapport and an effective working relationship with the patient. Although physicians try to be responsive and prompt in addressing the issues of their patients, the contact of such patients may pose potential challenges in the course of the practice. There is salient need for patients to exhibit a positive attitude and cooperation with the physician if the treatment process has to run smoothly. However, this is not always the case because some patients have a negative attitude and exhibits conduct that may pose challenges to the physicians. With people having an extensive knowledge of the available medical options, as well as their right to have personalized medical care, patients are likely to be overly demanding.

Technology

Technology and research are quite pivotal in today's modernised world and medicine relies on them more than we can actually measure. Most people know the benefits of having modern or even futuristic technology; it allows us to push the boundaries of research and revolutionize the way that we can perform medical procedures⁸. The worst drawbacks of such radical technological advantages may only reveal themselves further on.

Of course, technology has provided us with things like the Internet that has

proved to be so invaluable in the world of medicine that we cannot imagine getting by without it now. It allows us to share the worlds most talked about medical journals and papers with a single click, no questions asked. It allows for the rapid communication between medical facilities and research institutes all over the world so that most everywhere can have access to the same standards of information throughout the world.

This makes it exponentially easier to carry out good research and to get large research projects done much faster - something that are desperately sought after in today's world. Such advances have brought the world, many forms of personalized medicine and excellent generic medicines that can provide defence against many diseases that we have seen. In addition, because all this is relatively cheap to do, we have seen the introduction of very cheap and extremely effective medicines. This is of such benefit to the world that we have been able to eradicate some diseases entirely in the first world such as smallpox and TB9.

The problem with these generic medicines is that they can take a very long time to research some up to 10 years or more and that means enough money to run a project involving a large team of interdisciplinary professionals who will need plenty of funding for things like laboratory equipment in order for them to run well-designed experiments. This can be somewhat of a disadvantage as when the economy comes under serious strain as it has in the past and as it is all over the world at present. Because so much funding for research comes from government funding, when an economy does go into recession, very often the scientific research is cut from the budget. The reasons for this could be many; perhaps the project is

showing no developments after 10 years and millions of Euros worth of time and money; perhaps many of the people who have the final say in where the money goes are not sympathetic towards the world of science or medicine¹⁰.

Furthermore, the cost of technology is something that works against the health care system. In order to keep up with the latest and best in technology, it is necessary to spend the relevant amount of money to purchase these technologies and the newer they are, the more expensive they come. The monetary costs of everything in healthcare are rather ludicrous when we look at it as an individual and quite difficult to comprehend. However, some of the marvels that we are presented with after putting so many resources into the development of technology and the furthering of research are simply fantastic. Some of the possible opportunities that are available to us are unimaginable¹¹.

With the advent of resources such as 3D printing, we can essentially create anything we want just by inserting the dimensions into the printer and off it goes. This kind of technology could completely change the spending habits of the healthcare systems all over the world. We need only imagine all the resources that can be printed from nothing; syringes, surgical equipment, beds, the list goes on¹². It may seem completely absurd, but it is more than just a possibility for the future. However, how dependable are we on technology? We have no idea what the future may hold and we cannot be sure how well the world will be able to keep up with such things in the later down the line. Perhaps we are too dependent on something that we do not yet fully understand.

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