

The advantages and disadvantages of government hospital and free health care

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Every government provides services for their citizens. One of the key areas governments focus their attention on is public healthcare. Citizens have the benefit of receiving free health care services whenever they need it. Yet, everything that is provided for free has its drawbacks.

There are disadvantages as well as advantages associated with free health care services provided by governments for their citizens. Firstly, with the anticipation of free health services, there is a high likelihood of poor quality of services. According to the Ministry of Health's Strategic Plan 2011-2015, Fiji has one of the lowest total health expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) when compared to other Pacific Island countries. As a result of a lack of finances, it can be expected that health services and products may not be of high quality. Moreover, cheaper and less effective medication may be given in place of quality and effective drugs. It should not be expected that citizens have the best quality of health services due to the limited budget and expenditure of the ministry.

Another disadvantage of free health care is the shortage of doctors and nurses. The Minister of Health (Fiji), Dr Neil Sharma said that doctor shortages were a common occurrence in every part of the world and Fiji was no exception (Malo 2011, p. 5). For instance, at Rakiraki Hospital one doctor looks after over ten thousand people and only three doctors cater for the twenty-nine thousand population of Tavua (Malo 2011, p. 5). From this information it can be seen that the doctor to patient ratio is very low.

Thirdly, free health care services leads to overcrowding in hospitals. With the availability of free medical services, citizens have the opportunity to make

the most use of the services provided to them and this in turn leads to overcrowding. It is an all too common site to see long queues and frustrated patients at the outpatient section of major hospitals (Fiji Times Online 2008). Many people wait for hours before they are seen as the hospitals are just not large enough to cater for them all. With the large population of

Fiji, it is not surprising that overcrowding occurs in hospitals. However, free health care services have many advantages as well. Governments spend a lot of time, money and resources in providing health care services and it is only after carefully examining the benefits that these services are provided. The advantages that will be considered include benefit to all classes of people, the continual improvement of healthcare services and the reduction and control of disease outbreaks. Equally important to consider are the advantages of free health services.

Free health services benefit all classes of people especially the poor and needy who cannot afford expensive treatments offered at private hospitals and those citizens who do not have health insurance. In Fiji, the healthcare system is mainly financed through general taxation (Ministry of Health Strategic Plan 2011-2015, p. 11). The revenue collected from taxation is based on income levels and the ability of the individual to pay.

Consequently, the poor families benefit greatly from this service as they get the most out of it. In addition, another advantage to consider is that the government continually improves its services.

Citizens benefit greatly from the improved health services governments provide. According to the Minister of Health, Dr Neil Sharma, the ministry's foremost objective is to strengthen primary healthcare services in the country. The Permanent Secretary for Health, Dr Salanieta Saketa added that one major target for the ministry is to improve the delivery of primary healthcare services (Ministry of Health Annual Corporate Plan 2011, pp. 3-4). The Fiji government also spends a substantial amount on educating and training health professions (Panda 2003, p. 37). These are only a few of the many ways the government is improving the healthcare system. Finally, free health services help to reduce and control disease outbreaks.

Those individuals who are carriers of infectious diseases are treated and cared for. For example, the Ministry of Health has sections dealing with HIV and AIDS, adolescent and reproductive health, oral health and non-communicable diseases to name a few. Information is also provided on these diseases and prevention. These services are very beneficial to the citizens and the nation as a whole as it stops the risk of spreading the illness to the entire population.

Free health services are indeed beneficial for the entire population. In conclusion, free health services provided by governments have its disadvantages and advantages. Although there are disadvantages to this service, in some ways, the advantages do outweigh the disadvantages. Governments do recognise the need for poor and needy families' access to healthcare services and also know that in order to cater for their citizens needs, they must continually improve their health services.

Governments also recognise the need to control or if possible eliminate the outbreak of infectious diseases in order to protect the entire population. The government has done a great job in providing the citizens with healthcare services and this can be improved by allocating more finances to the health sector. With these in play, it is safe to say that the free health care services governments provide have great advantages for their citizens.