




THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF HEALTH CARE: QUALITY

TOPICS COVERED:

-  The characteristics of a quality health system
-  The key features of a quality health system
-  The impact of language barriers on the quality of care and client safety

According to the World Health Organization, a comprehensive system of care allows people to access a continuum of care across their life course, comprising health promotion, disease prevention, diagnosis, treatment, disease management, rehabilitation, emotional and spiritual support, and palliative care. (WHO, 2021)

Further, according to the Canadian Patient Safety Institute (CPSI), “quality of care is the degree to which health services for individuals and populations increase the likelihood of desired health outcomes and are consistent with evidence-based professional knowledge.” (CPSI, 2021)

Providing quality health care is the ultimate goal of every health organization and all health professionals. Quality assurance in terms of health care is a shared responsibility among several actors and organizations within the care system, including professional bodies and regulatory authorities.

THE KEY FEATURES OF A QUALITY HEALTH SYSTEM

Feature	Explanation	For the individual receiving care	For the individual providing care
Safe	Care minimizes any risk for clients, namely medical errors.	I receive care that is unlikely to jeopardize my health.	I provide care that will cause no harm to the client.
Effective	Care complies with scientific knowledge and is evidence-based.	I receive care based on scientific knowledge that contributes to improving my health.	I provide care that is based on best practices and generates desirable outcomes.
People-centered	Care takes into account each individual's preferences, values and needs.	I receive care that considers my goals and my preferences. I feel respected; I participate in my own health care.	I consider clients' preferences, values and needs.
Efficient	Care is provided such as to avoid wasting resources, equipment, medication, energy and ideas.	I receive care from a team where each member acts according to their competencies. I receive appropriate medication and correct treatments.	I provide quality care, by using human, financial and physical resources, while avoiding wastage.
Available in a timely manner	Care is offered in a timely manner, avoiding delays in providing and receiving services.	I know the waiting period before receiving services or taking tests. The period is reasonable and does not jeopardize my health.	I adhere to the intended schedule in welcoming clients and I plan for their treatment in a timely manner.
Equitable	Health care is of the same quality, regardless of a client's age, sex, race, origin, geographical location, religion, socioeconomic situation or language.	I can access health care services, whoever I am and wherever I live.	A client's age, language, location of residence and socioeconomic situation has no impact on the quality of care provided.

(Adapted from WHO, 2019)

THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE BARRIERS ON THE QUALITY OF CARE AND CLIENT SAFETY



In the literature on language barriers “quality care” is presumed to be equivalent care for patients who speak English and those who do not. In other words, the emphasis is on disparities in access and care between two population groups (Bowen 2015).

Language barriers can have significant impact on the quality of health care. Among other consequences, they can lead to errors in diagnostics, medical errors, important delays and inappropriate medication in pain treatments.

One of the main issues related to accessing health services and the quality of said services is language concordance between provider and patient. (translated from de Moissac, 2016, p. 37)

THE BENEFITS OF PROVIDING CARE IN A CLIENT'S MOTHER TONGUE



Research has shown that providing services in a client's mother tongue has several benefits, including:

- A more accurate assessment of health status
- Improved access to health services, particularly to health promotion and disease prevention activities
- The treatment received allows for personal interactions, which improves the therapeutic rapport and leads to more positive clinical outcomes
- Clients have a better understanding of the treatment plan and are more likely to adhere to it
- Clients find greater satisfaction and risk management problems related to the provision of services are less frequent

Therefore, effective communication is essential to providing safe and quality health care. Raising awareness about the impact of language barriers and implementing strategies to mitigate these barriers are the only mechanisms that will promote the delivery of safe and quality health services to clients who live in minority settings.

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