

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

WHAT HEALTH MANAGEMENT TOPIC FREQUENTLY APPEARED IN THE NEW ENGLAND MEDICAL JOURNAL (NEMJ) ? : A SYSTEMIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

- Introduction** : It is no doubt that the success of any health organization depends so closely on its managerial functions. To achieve this, the leader or manager as the core strategist of its organization must in all time be updated with the latest evidence-based information so that he or she can be easily operationalized his or her management function in more effective and sustainable manners. It depends largely on scientific literatures that published relevant articles within this scope. Unfortunately, management topics related to health care system is scattered published and this has indirectly affect manager to access the latest scientific documents.
- Methods** : We examined the practice of well known international journal in health care namely New England Medical Journal (NEMJ) on its role in propagating latest health management topics to its prospective clients.
- Results** : The result showed that a total of 31% health management topics were published throughout 2007 out of 1140 articles appeared. Of these, about 33% were confined to general health administration. The remaining articles were related to healthcare delivery practices (24%), medical ethics and legal matters (17% each), and manpower issues and training (9%).
- Conclusion** : Focus on managerial related articles relatively low as compared to clinical and other evidence-based medicine that clearly dominated health management issues.
- Keywords** : health management, management function, healthcare delivery

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INTRODUCTION

The delivery of healthcare is rapidly changing. Health services and healthcare technologies are increasingly impacting the care as well as the administrative dimensions of healthcare. There is a relative shift in consumer's preference and they would be expecting all the new remedy as well as better services. Hospitals and healthcare institutions have to compete among themselves to provide better healthcare and have to concentrate on building a strong network, good organization management as well as be ready to expand and update.

Management is a very crucial segment in healthcare delivery because it directly relates to the consumers care, organization and health system. Good health management does not only mean strengthening the organizational resource network but also being aware of community needs. By knowing what the people want and what the people have to say about the medical and health situation and deliverance, health care services can learn and improve.

It is no doubt that the success of any health organization depends so closely on its managerial functions. To achieve this, the leader or manager as the core strategist of its organization must in all time be updated with the latest evidence-based information so that he or she can be easily operationalized his or her management function in more effective and sustainable manners.

Latest write up with regards to the current situation and practice in healthcare deliverance as well as challenges related to it are very important information for any hospitals or health institutions to steadily grow, expand and deliver better. It serves a significant evidence-based stuff in medical and health practices¹.

Therefore, scientifically driven peer reviewed sources have become a very resourceful tool in assisting manager and leader to improve its services. It involves systematic searching of the relevant literature to identify information that can be applied to a clearly defined problem with regards to healthcare and the delivery of it. It employs in depth review of the article, in which specific items of information are extracted from each work and compared. The most sophisticated form of systematic review is meta-analysis, or quantitative synthesis of the statistical results of a number of studies on a given topic². Internet excess is available everywhere and information about anything is available just a click away. Today, managers,

stake holders, policy makers as well as doctors and nurses can access informations online regarding hospital, community and healthcare issues.

The question is how many management articles have appeared in established scientific journals, what are the common issues discussed and what extend of this information are really cited and used to improve health care management. So far not much research has been carried out with regards to the number of management articles appeared in peer-reviewed medical journal. Therefore, this study tries to review how many management articles have been published. We hope that this work can give us some insights of what is happening in health care delivery system publications.

METHODOLOGY

A systemic review was conducted on online New England Medical Journal (NEMJ) to identify and to find out the frequency of managerial-related articles that have appeared. The review was done for the year 2007 and all articles, comments, summaries and views were included. Once collected, all topics were analyzed; grouped and management-related topics were identified and calculated.

Management-related articles were defined as any topic with regards to the management of resources, manpower, money, materials and managerial skills in various fields in the deliverance of healthcare. Topics from not only articles but summaries and reviews were taken into account.

The entire management topic that was gathered is further categorized into five fields and they were 1) healthcare delivery practices (for example services innovation, health reform, health insurance scheme, health economy initiatives, quality of care etc.), 2) health administration (for example leadership style, communication, managing human resources etc), 3) manpower issues and training (such as residency work hours and also challenges for academic medical centers and medical schools), 4) legal matters (such as suicidal management, patient's rights, malpractice and stem cells and cloning) and 5) medical ethics (covers all issues pertaining to research subjects).

RESULTS

NEMJ was a resourceful medical and health literature that was normally referred and cited by

many people. It has contributed lots in science and art of medicine, and the improvement of the public health. As an international peer-reviewed journal, it was one of the most widely circulated medical journals in the world. Its online version was made freely available to institutions in developing countries.

Table 1 showed the number of articles, summaries and reviews published by NEJM online in the 2007, from the table it can be seen that in 2007, a total of 1140 articles, summaries and reviews were published in the NEMJ online website. This gave an average of 95 articles, summaries and reviews published every month. Of 1140 articles, a total of 352 management-related topics (31%) were identified.

Table 1 Number of articles, summaries and reviews published by NEMJ online in the year 2007

Month	Number
January	100
February	99
March	116
April	89
May	93
June	99
July	90
August	112
September	84
October	68
November	106
December	84
Total	1140

Table 2 showed the various management field appeared in NEJM online website for the year 2007. As can be seen in table 2, topics related to general health administration and healthcare delivery practices dominated the management articles. The former seemed to be the most published (33%), particularly on leadership style, communication manners and managing the human resources.

Most articles concerned for smooth delivery of its managerial function. As to ongoing management, communication was identified to be very important aspect of daily chores not only between doctors and staff members but also with patients. Customer services and communication between patients and doctors were some of the topic that was discussed in many articles.

Table 2 Various management field appeared in NEMJ online website for the year 2007

Management field	Number	%
1. Healthcare delivery practices	83	24
2. General health administration	118	33
3. Legal matters	59	17
4. Manpower issues and training	32	9
5. Medical ethics	60	17
Total	352	100

Next group of article was articles regarding healthcare delivery practices. Example of articles included those related to the quality of healthcare, concept of healthcare reform, health insurance scheme and quality management. Efficiency and quality in delivering healthcare services were highly focused. It then followed by issues related to healthcare innovation and reform as a way to moving ahead and improving healthcare services. In addition, articles on health economic, insurance scheme and challenges in healthcare were also discussed. All of it constituted 24 % of the total management articles. If this areas were combined, both areas collectively contributed more than half (57%) of management topics appeared in NEMJ.

It then followed closely by medical ethics and the legal matters, where both collectively contributed 17% each. Issues on safety of drugs and protecting patients in

research studies and clinical trials were highlighted most in medical ethics, whereas, topics regarding regulations, consent and public protection from medical malpractice were common in legal matters.

Topic on manpower issues and training was only 9%. Most of the topics were confined to education quality and the relevance of it in terms of delivering healthcare.

Table 3 showed the frequency of various management field appeared in NEJM online website by month 2007. After further analysis, an average of 29 management topics appeared every month. The highest being May (48 management article) and the lowest was January (17 articles). It was noticed that articles on healthcare delivery practices were slowly increasing - started with 3-5 articles (January – May) and has recently increased to 6-10 articles (June - December).

Table 3 Frequency of various management field appeared in NEMJ online website by month 2007

Month	Healthcare delivery practices	General health administration	Legal matters	Manpower issues & training	Medical ethics	Total
January	5	8	0	2	2	17
February	5	5	3	4	3	20
March	7	11	0	1	2	21
April	4	12	5	1	6	28
May	3	15	15	3	12	48
June	8	11	9	5	8	41
July	9	9	3	4	9	34
August	9	11	6	1	4	31
September	7	12	5	1	1	26
October	10	10	6	3	6	35
November	6	10	6	6	4	32
December	10	4	1	1	3	19
Total	83	118	59	32	60	352

DISCUSSION

These days, there are thousand of online medical articles being published. Most of the online medical journal portals publish clinically orientated papers. Management topics in healthcare and hospital have long been published but not as many as the clinical articles. Nevertheless, it is still important and is noted to be increasing.

In this review, a total of 352 or 31% appearances of topic regarding management have been published in the NEMJ in 2007. This was almost one third of the total items published. If

compared to Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA) for the similar period, the appearance of management topics was comparatively higher where JAMA was only published 8.6% in 2007³.

Of various management topic that was published, about 33% confined to general healthcare administration. Those topic included leadership style, communication manners and managing the human resources. Communication function was identified to be the most important aspect of administrative activity. It was not only confined towards relationship between doctors and staff members but also with patients. Main

focus was more on staff and customer satisfaction goal. The importance of communication function between various stakeholders in healthcare system were admitted and deeply examined by Conigliaro⁴.

Topics regarding healthcare delivery practice were the second most frequently published. Out of 24% from the total 352 management topics, efficiency in delivering services are highly focused. One of the article was deeply questioning efficiency of doctors and physicians in delivering their services⁵. Issues such as healthcare reform as a way to moving ahead and improving healthcare services was also discussed⁶. In addition, articles on health economic, insurance and challenges in healthcare were also discussed.

Medical ethics and legal matters were topics that were published at almost the same amount, at 17% each. For instance, issues on safety of drugs and protecting patients in research studies and clinical trials were highlighted most in medical ethics. One article for example specifically concern about authorization of drug safety⁷. Whereas, topics regarding regulations, consent and public protection from medical malpractice were common in legal matters.

Finally, only 9% of the management topics published were regarding manpower issues and training. Most of the topics were confined to education quality and the relevance of it in terms of delivering healthcare.

Focus on clinical and other evidence-based medicine has clearly dominated over health management issues in evidence based journals. As to the management topics, lots of topics were not thoroughly examined. Some crucial and evidence-based topics in the field of health economic, strategic planning, utilization of information technology in health care, evaluation and performance indicators, health assessments technology to name the few, were not explicitly revealed and discussed. However, this did not mean that NEMJ ignoring this topic. We believed with thorough literature search for publication before 2007, we might be able to find the answer.

Therefore literature search on health management should not only limit to its core scientific journals. Efforts might also be spent on collateral journal related to medical and health, then the true and latest information on management could be easily accessed. To the manager, this was vital as the direction of your

organization was totally influenced by the lessons generated or learned from the other people.

CONCLUSION

Management is a very important entity in healthcare delivery. Without proper management, and latest evidence-based information, any health care organization including hospitals regardless of having the best manager or even the latest in technology will not excel. Lessons must be learned from the existing scientific literatures, and one must not depends so much on its core journals. Since not all health topic will appeared in health or medical journal, they sometimes appeared in other journal relevant to the field. Health management topic for instance might appear more often in others appropriate and resourceful journals pertaining to the field. Therefore it must be sought.

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