

Achieving a Sustainable Health System - Proposing a Conceptual Framework for a System of 'Sustainabilities' and a new focus for the debate on Sustainability of Health System

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Abstract

Sustainability has since the late 1990s dominated the debate on health system. The uncertainty that has been surrounding the situation of the economic and financial in the world, are adding to the already existing concerns of accelerating costs and increasing doubts regarding the system capacity and resources in meeting the health services needs. In this debate health system and health care system are often used interchangeably; and the focus has often been on the couple 'revenue and expenditure'. The debate has therefore mainly focused on the accounting perspective: playing with the level of revenue to decide on the level of expenditure for the health care system. The alarm bell has always been sounded when there is a decline in revenue and continuous increase in health system expenditure.

This paper acknowledges the importance of the accounting dimension (cost-containment) in the health system sustainability debate; however, it challenges the dominant focus on this dimension and reviews the various 'Sustainabilities'. It differentiates between health system and health care system and acknowledges how critical is the health-to-wealth relationship (e.g. economic costs of ill health).

Using the Systems thinking methodology and the principles of Mulej's Dialectical System theory (Law of Requisite Holism), a conceptual framework is then proposed for a System of 'Sustainabilities' (i.e. the interconnectedness of the various 'Sustainabilities'), towards achieving a sustainable health system. A new focus is proposed for the debate on the Sustainability of health system at the meta decision-making level, which will be on the sustained linkages between the various 'Sustainabilities', grounded on social responsibility principles.

Keywords: Expenditure, health care system, health system, health-to-wealth relationship, Meta decision- making level, revenue, sustainable health system, System of 'Sustainabilities', Systems thinking, Dialectical System theory (Law of Requisite Holism), social responsibility.

Title:

- Achieving Sustainability of Health System - A new paradigm

Objectives

- To propose a Conceptual Framework for a System of 'Sustainabilities' and
- To propose a new focus for the debate on Sustainability of Health System



Approach

- Review and acknowledge the importance of the accounting dimension (cost-containment) in the health system sustainability debate; challenge the main focus on this dimension and review the various 'Sustainabilities';
- Differentiate between health system and health care system, and acknowledge how critical is the health-to-wealth relationship (e.g. economic costs of ill health)
- Use of Systems thinking methodology and the Dialectical System theory (Law of Requisite Holism).

Results:

- Identification of the Limitation of accounting-based approach in addressing the challenges of the sustainability of health system.
- Identification of key "sustainabilities" relevant to the sustainability of health system.
- Identification of the point of interconnectedness for each identified sustainability.

Conclusion:

- A conceptual framework for a System of 'Sustainabilities' (i.e. the interconnectedness of the various 'Sustainabilities')
- A new focus for the debate on the Sustainability of health system at the meta decision-making level: on the sustained linkages between the various 'Sustainabilities'

