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REVIEW

Management in health care: development of three level academic programmes

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ABSTRACT

Rapid changes in both the society and health care system require new qualified professionals who have full understanding of the processes in health care and of organizational health issues, and who have knowledge and skills which enable them to introduce and direct changes in the organization of health care institutions and companies associated with functioning of the health care system (pharmaceutical companies, health insurance, producers and contractors of medical equipment etc.). Since this educational concept is completely new in our regions and induced by the motives of a sooner and better reform of our health care system, we wanted to educate the existing managing structure in our health care institutions, mostly medical in vocation, and new students, in terms of organization, planning and management. The aim of those studies is to educate professionals on the basis of interdisciplinary and international program, specifically focused on planning, handling and directing tasks and resources in health care.

Keywords: study program, health care management, undergraduate, graduate study program

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INTRODUCTION

During the past year, faculty from the University of Rijeka and the Cleveland State University developed guidelines concerning the appropriate content for a postgraduate level program in health administration (1). In June, 2003 a tentative outline for a year and half program was suggested. Faculty from Cleveland State University and the health administration program at the Indiana University has reviewed those suggestions within the context of expected skills and competencies that are expected in accredited programs within the United States. Beside the postgraduate level program, undergraduate and graduate study programs are also prepared for five (3+2) academic years. According the Bologna process, the workload for undergraduate students is 180 and 120 credits (ECTS – European Credit Transfer System) for the master's degree. In the process of accreditation of the programs, all valuable reviewers' suggestions in relation changes in methodology of teaching are accepted. Mentoring system and work in small groups was introduced. 86% undergraduate students finished the first academic year successfully.

REASONS FOR INITIATING THE STUDY

Appropriateness of the study regarding the needs in public and private sector is more than evident. We have over-qualified physicians employed as representatives of pharmaceutical companies or contractors of medical equipment companies, who completed expensive and long program, but which is partly even deficient, since it doesn't cover principles of economy and organizational abilities. By combining knowledge of informatics, medicine and medical terminology, ethics, law, economy, management, they can contribute to the development of a system to become more effective in treatment and patient care, medical research, planning, implementation of changes and innovations to the system and financial benefits for the organizational unit – institution. The study is intended for functions in management or active participation in a part of managing structures.

These professionals will have appropriate knowledge of data analysis in the investigation of large health care institutions, collection of statistical data underlying long-term planning, control and revealing patient's documents and other confidential data. Having master's degrees, and holding positions of business secretaries or heads in clinics or other institutions associated with health care, they will be responsible for decision-making and daily activities.

Employment prospects or job market outlook for graduated students will be: business secretary of a clinic, assistant manager and supervisor, supervisor for employment of support medical staff, employment in a company representing a contractor of medical equipment, in pharmaceutical industry, at the department for long-term planning in health care institutions, health insurance companies, departments for risk planning, in tasks concerning planning and research in health care, at the departments of home care, a specific population-oriented homes, governmental organizations associated with supervision and work in health care and sectors of health and social care in local government and self-government.

Education for such posts is insufficient in all neighboring countries and we believe that labor market for future students is exceptionally large.

UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDY PROGRAM

Associations such as ASPHER (Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region) (2), as well as MGMA (3) offer guidelines for performance domains of technical/professional skills needed to be introduced in a study program. Those are: financial management tasks, human resources management tasks, governance and organizational dynamics, planning and marketing tasks, information management tasks, risk management, business and clinical operations and professional responsibility tasks. A matrix of expected skills and competencies has been prepared as a work exercise for the faculty expecting

to be involved in the program (4). Each faculty member should examine the core competencies and indicate whether or not those would be covered in each of the specific classes. This analysis will then identify gaps in course work where the desired competencies are not addressed. Modifications to course syllabi can then be affected to address the gaps.

Correlation of the program with contemporary scientific concepts and/or skills based on them is obvious in the outline of the study as a whole and in each course. The study provides knowledge and skills based on concepts from medical, economic, legal, computer and psychological sciences. Courses, contents and acquisition of skills are distributed in the following framework: basic educational – academic courses (20%, 60 ECTS), medical courses (40%, 120 ECTS), economy courses (20%, 60 ECTS), law (15%, 45 ECTS) and psychology (5%, 15 ECTS).

Undergraduate and graduate study programs are prepared for five (3+2) academic years. According to the Bologna process, the workload for undergraduate students is 180 and 120 credits (ECTS – European credit transfer system) for master's degree. The first problem was introduction and organization of an interdisciplinary education program at the University level since we have schools and faculties which are just formally members of the University. Universities in Croatia are not integrated. The study program, organization, planning and management in health care are for the first time proposed as a university program of four different faculties. Accredited study program can be housed in the schools or in campuses representing a rich source of opportunities for multi-disciplinary team work.

Entrance requirements

After having completed a four-year secondary program in the Republic of Croatia or in a foreign country students are admitted on the basis of classification procedure. Classification procedure (including high school grades average,

classification test and classification interview with the enrolment committee) is determined by the Faculty Council.

For the first time in our country this concept of study will be completely open for students, which would be regulated by the study program. Depending on their personal interest and inter-institutional contacts, students will attend elective courses, partly or completely, at other Faculties of social or natural sciences. Students, who have earned 180 ECTS at the study of medicine, dentistry or at academic first degree of sanitary engineering, organized at the School of Medicine in Rijeka, could enroll a graduate study. The mentioned studies are largely, but with certain differences, sufficient for entering the graduate study of health care management. Medical and dental curricula in higher years include demanding clinical courses, and some students in higher years realize their own limitations which do not depend on their work and efforts. Although more than 50% of students complete the program of medicine, some of them drop out in the 3rd year. They will be offered an option of transfer to another study and a possibility to complete academic education without losing credits acquired in the first three years.

At the beginning it was very hard to introduce completely new system of education. The demands on students appear to be unrealistically high because of too many contact hours and obligatory reading. Similar to the educational tradition in Central Europe, the master segment of the program is too structured: too many required courses and thus too little time for electives. At this level students should be allowed to tailor their program according to their previous experience. As part of the graduation requirement, students should participate in an internship in a health-related organization to develop practical expertise in applying solution to management and policy problems. This can also assist them in securing future employment.

In the process of accreditation of the study programs, all valuable reviewers' suggestions were accepted. We reduced the number of lec-

tures by employing small group work techniques as the primary teaching methods. The student mentoring service was introduced to advise and support students on their choices.

POSTGRADUATE PROGRAM

In cooperation with the teaching staff from the University of Rijeka, Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Law, and Faculty of Philosophy, and the Cleveland State University, Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs, we organized postgraduate specialist study which has attracted high interest.

This program is comparable with the majority of 65 similar programs offered in the USA. We had special meetings and consultations with Karen Harlow Rosentraub, study coordinator at the Indiana State University, Indiana, Illinois, USA; and with experts from the Cleveland State University, Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs, Ohio, USA. The study is also comparable with the program at the Harvard School of Public Health and Study of International Health Care Management, the Bocconi University, Italy.

The proposed program is generally in line with the ASPHER guidelines (1, 2, 5).

In the course of arrangements for the mentioned postgraduate study, it was evident that there was interest in the introduction of undergraduate and graduate programs shown by big health care systems, private polyclinics, pharmaceutical companies, insurance companies and local government departments concerned with health and social care.

Health systems and institutions and service sector associated with health care require an increasing number of highly-educated employees. Professions are not strictly defined in today's Europe and worldwide in the science fields, as it is the case in Croatia. Moreover, in some fields of health care it is not easy to distinguish between training in social sciences and natural ones. There is a rising tendency of education in ethics, psychology and informatics which is not included in our current classification of schools and faculties. Only an interdisciplinary approach provides education for an expert who will be acquainted with all processes in organization, planning and management in health care.

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