

THE PROPER ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF STATE FOR HEALTH-CARE SERVICES: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MINISTRY OF HEALTH OF TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

The Ministry of Health (MoH) in Turkey is responsible for the provision of health-care services. MoH have many roles and functions including delivery of preventative care, development of policy and overseeing regulatory and statutory functions, supervision of private medical facilities etc. This paper aims to explore the current as well as proper roles and functions of the state for the provision of health-care services.

Key Words: Health-care services, Turkey, Ministry of Health of Turkey.

JEL Classification: I00, I18.

I. INTRODUCTION

In Turkey, the Ministry of Health (MoH) is responsible for establishing and implementing general decisions and policies with regard to health care services at central level. The MoH is the head organization with the responsibility to provide first and second level health care services as well as a body that provides services regarding preventive health care. In this paper, we aim to explore the current and expected roles and functions of the Ministry of Health (MoH) for the delivery of health-care services.

II. REDEFINING THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF STATE IN THE FIELD OF HEALTH-CARE SERVICES

Worldwide trends and dynamics of change have brought on significant changes to the state's roles and functions and hence those involving health care. The state's

roles and functions concerning health care can be classified and analyzed under the following six main headings. (Aktan-Işık, 2007.) (See Figure-1)

The stewardship function. The state does not directly carry out the directorship in health care services but rather orients them,

The planning function. The state formulates a strategic plan in the field of health and identifies relevant national targets.

The inspection function. The state inspects institutions and establishments providing health care.

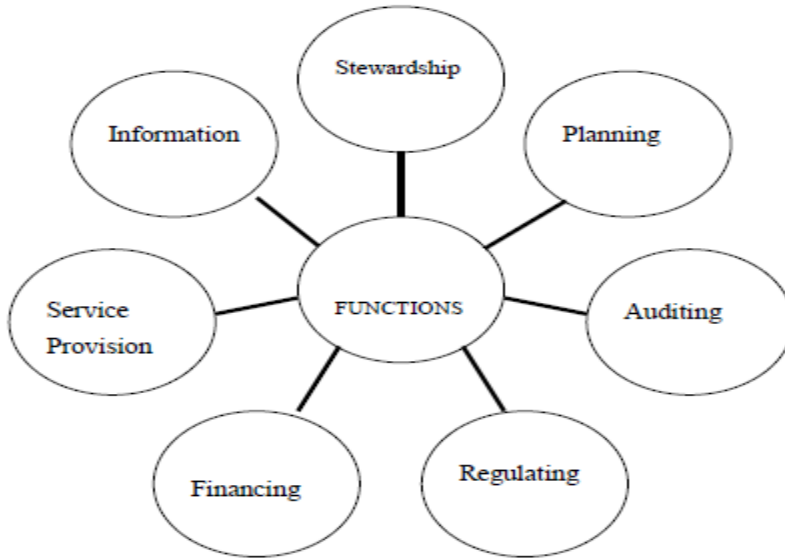
The regulation function. The state establishes general regulatory rules and institutions within the health platform.

The delivery function. The state focuses on provision of preventive health care; providing opportunities for the private sector, and to take care of the remaining fields of health care provision, and to promote such initiatives.

The financing function. Preventive health care is financed directly from the general budget. Those with a lower income are encouraged and supported to benefit health care from the private sector. Providing direct or indirect financial support to private health institutions.

The information function. The state informs the public on health care; that service is provided in a more efficient manner through the utilization of information and communication technologies in the field of health care.

Figure-1: The Major Roles and Functions of the State in Health Care.



Source: Developed by the author.

III. REDEFINING THE MoH CENTRAL ORGANIZATION'S ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Before there can be any restructuring in the Ministry of Health (MoH) central organization, it is important that the Ministry's roles and functions in the field of health care are redefined. It is possible to sum up these new roles and functions as follows: ¹

- The role of direct delivery of health-care services should be taken away from the MoH; instead, it should be transformed into an institution

¹ For mor information please see: Aktan-Saran, 2007; Dünya Bankası, 2002; Ministry of Health, 1993; Ministry of Health, 1999; Sağlık Bakanlığı, 1993; Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2002; Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2003; World Bank, 2003. ; Preker, 2000. Baker, 2002.; Birleşik Sağlık Sistemleri, 2003a; Birleşik Sağlık Sistemleri, 2003b. ; Sağlık Bakanlığı & Çalışma ve Sosyal Güvenlik Bakanlığı, 2003.

defining and monitoring policies and regulating the quality of services in achieving and maintaining standardization.

- The MoH should be given the roles of only planning, regulation and inspection as regards all treatment health care apart from preventive care.
- The MoH should draw up an overall strategic plan in which it should define general policies and standards concerning health care.
- All barriers to the development of private sector's share in health care should be eliminated and decisions serving for liberalization and deregulation in the health sector should be made and implemented with due speed.
- The centralized structure in health care should be done away with, bringing a more decentralized organization. The tasks and functions of the MoH central organization should be limited to planning, regulation and inspection and the remaining tasks and services should be referred to local administrations as far as possible.

Ministry of Health (MoH) can carry out the following functions we have summarized below ²

The MoH's stewardship function

MoH's major role should be stewardship instead of management. The MoH should be turned into an organization developing general policies and setting standards. The Ministry should perform stewardship with a view to ensuring that the resources allocated by public and private institutions and bodies for health care are utilized to provide efficiency, productivity and fairness in health care provision.

The MoH's planning function

The MoH should be transformed into a strategic organization carrying out planning.

The MoH's inspection function

² Aktan-Saran, 2007; Dünya Bankası, 2002; World Bank Ministry of Health, 1993; Ministry of Health, 1999; Sağlık Bakanlığı, 1993; Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2003; World Bank, 2003.

The MoH should perform the function of inspecting not only all public institutions and bodies providing health care but those which are private as well.

The MoH' regulation function

One of MoH's most important task is to regulate the market. The Ministry should be responsible for matters of identifying and ensuring the implementation of standards for all kinds of health care provision as well as the safety and efficiency of all kinds of products. This task should also include the accreditation of health care providers, those in the health care profession as well as their training. Below are the main bodies that should be established in order to ensure that the MoH effectively performs its regulatory function:

The National Body for Pharmaceuticals. This body should be established in order to serve for the regulation and promotion of stewardship in matters such as defining policies, authorization granting, manufacturing, advertising and sales of pharmaceuticals and R&D activities. It should be responsible for controls of pharmaceuticals, vaccines, serums, blood and blood components and for the maintenance of quality of these products from the production or importation stage all the way to consumption.

The Body for Medical Devices. This body's task area should be medical devices planning and purchasing, the comparative evaluation of medical devices, safety programs, clinical engineering applications, etc. One of the fundamental functions of this body should be to ensure standardization and inspection in medical consumption material and devises.

The MoH's financing function

Primary services the MoH is to finance are those relating to preventive health care. Because it is not possible to leave all preventive health care services to the market, it is a must that these services be financed by the MoH. In order to ensure that part of the society with a lower income also request services in the remaining areas of health care, it comes as necessary that the MoH either partially or entirely contributes to the financing of these services.

The MoH's health care provision function

An important function of the MoH is its task related with the provision of preventive health care. The state has integral tasks and functions in preventing communicable diseases, providing clean water and in matters of environmental health. Due to the high degree of negative externality in some health services (sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis, various vaccine-preventable diseases, etc.) they are bound to be provided by the state. Such diseases affect not only the patient but those who are in close contact with them as well.

The modern practice method in first level health care is the family practitioner system. Moreover, special attention should be paid to mother and child health in providing efficient preventive health care. It is important the MoH focuses on preventive health care in meeting the objectives and targets identified under the millennium developmental targets relating to health.

The MoH's information function

One of the most important aspects of health care involves lack of information. There exists an asymmetry of information between the physician providing care and the patient receiving it. Further, moral hazard shows that the health market may not operate with enough efficiency and accuracy. This is why the state's function of providing information occupies an important share in the provision of health care. In addition to the above stated functions, the MoH should make use of information and communication technologies to the fullest and implement the e-health project in the most efficient and productive manner.

Another major task of MoH is to collect data on the nation's health and on the system of health provision as a whole and to analyze and publish such data.

It is possible to sum up the primary tasks and functions that should be undertaken by the MoH central organization as follows: ³

- Preparing a National Health Strategy;
- Identifying objectives and targets for the national health strategy, taking into account national targets relating to health care;
- Identifying purchasing policies at both central and local levels in the field of health;

³ Ministry of Health,1993;1999; Sağlık Bakanlığı, 1992, Sağlık Bakanlığı,1993; Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2003.

- Formulating, regularly developing and implementing the national health information management plan; (the Health Information System)
- Ensuring the efficient distribution of resources allocated to health care within the public budget; (efficiency function in resource distribution)
- Efficient human resources management in health care;
- Planning and monitoring rational use of pharmaceuticals;
- Monitoring total quality management practices in public institutions providing health care;
- Planning and monitoring accreditation activities in public institutions providing health care;
- To create disease coding systems and ensure that these are employed by all health care providers;
- To make mandatory certificates of bioavailability for each pharmaceutical to be supplied to the market by pharmaceuticals producers and importers and to ensure rational pricing in pharmaceuticals;
- To create a national health database and national health accounts;
- Carrying out efficient internal and external auditing in public institutions providing health care;
- Identifying safety standards for all kinds of health-related service and for all types of products; (quality and accreditation)
- The MoH should also be responsible for identifying and monitoring essential principles and policies relating to an efficient human resources management. the MoH central organization's role concerning human resources management could be summed up as follows:
- To establish a rational human resources management .
- To establish a unit for human resources planning with sufficient capacity to implement reforms in health care management and provision within the body of the MoH;
- To ensure the active participation of provincial health administrations by forming a decentralized capacity for human resource planning and management;
- To make the job descriptions of health personnel serving in the MoH central organization;
- To ensure the continuing training of health personnel serving in the MoH central organization.

IV. WHAT SHOULD THE MoH's ROLE BE IN HEALTH CARE PROVISION AND FINANCING?

The MoH has a very fundamental role in health care, which is the provision of preventive health care. The remaining treatment care however, could be provided by both the public and the private sector.

Taking a look at worldwide initiatives in health reforms, it is possible to see that centralized structures are done away with, enabling decentralization in services, and that emphasis is made on methods such as privatization and liberalization in the provision of services. (see.Figure-2)⁴

V. RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE MoH's CENTRAL ORGANIZATION

We can summarize the major recommendations regarding the reconstruction of the Ministry of Health of Turkey as follows: ⁵

1.Reformulating the Legislation

- Outdated legislation in the field of health should either be repealed or updated.
- Public opinion should be obtained when making new legal arrangements and implementing personnel should be informed of and trained on these legal arrangements before they are implemented.

⁴ For more information about delivery and/or financing of health-care services, see: APHA,2005; Batrel, 1993; Culyer et.all,1981(a); Culyer et.all,1981(b); Hecht & Mosgrove,1993; Kovacek & Kovcek, 1998.

⁵ Ministry of Health,1993;1999; Sağlık Bakanlığı, 1992, Sağlık Bakanlığı,1993; Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2003.

Figure -2: Health Care Provision and Alternative Methods in Financing

		Public	Health Care Provision	Private
Health Care Financing	Public	<p>CENTRALIZATION METHOD</p> <p>(Health care is completely financed by the state budget and is provided in state hospitals under the management and organization of the central administration.)</p>	<p>-CONTRACTING OUT METHOD</p> <p>(Purchase, etc. by the State of the necessary medicinal devices from the private sector for health care)</p> <p>-DELEGATION METHOD</p> <p>(To send patients to private hospitals for treatment- expenses are covered by the state)</p> <p>-VOUCHER METHOD</p> <p>(Giving health vouchers to those with a low-income- private hospitals give patients care in return to these vouchers)</p>	
	Private	<p>DECENTRALIZATION METHOD</p> <p>(Health care is completely financed by the state budget and is provided under the organization and management of local administration bodies.)</p>	<p>-GRANT METHOD</p> <p>(Support from state budget to private health institutions providing health care)</p>	
		1	2	
		3	4	
		<p>-Individuals can receive privileged private health care under better conditions in public hospitals by paying an additional fee.</p> <p>(For instance, staying at private rooms in state hospitals by paying an additional fee)</p>	<p>MARKET METHOD</p> <p>-Individuals can go to private hospitals by paying an additional fee.</p> <p>-Individual can hold a private (special – health) insurance; and private hospital expenses are covered by this insurance.</p>	

Source: Developed by the author.

2. Downsizing

The Ministry of Health of Turkey is now a bureaucratic organization. Therefore, rightsizing and downsizing are important steps for restructuring. MoH cancel out unnecessary units or consolidate them with the relevant units.

3. Decentralization

The Ministry should transfer its tasks in inpatient treatment care to local administrations in due time. No public institution other than Armed Forces and

universities should be providing inpatient treatment care. The provincial organization should be reconstructed in line with the principle of decentralization.

4. Coordination and Inspection

The health system is made up of many components such as administration, regulation, inspection, health care provision and financing. Success of the system depends on the collaborative operation between each of these components. A single setback in even one of the components will have negative effect on the operation of the system as a whole. This makes inspection within the system very important. In order to ensure good quality in inspections it is important that inspection mechanisms are reinforced and that such mechanisms have the capacity to make fast decisions and forthwith implement them.

5. Autonomy

Hospitals serving under public institutions should be granted autonomy in terms of their administrative and financial capacity and autonomous hospitals should be operated based on the principle of cost-efficiency.

6. Financing

As it is already known, social security institutions and institutions providing service operate separately, which entails a difference in the facilities provided between their members. In order to provide for the efficient operation of the system it is necessary that these institutions are consolidated under one single institution, creating standardization in the facilities provided for their members.

6. Information

The MoH should carry out its function of providing information in all fields related with public health. An on-line communication network should be established between the MoH and provinces. Standards necessary for achieving national and international integration in health information (electronic health records, health indicators, data security, etc) should be identified and the relevant legal arrangements should be made.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Ministry of Health of Turkey presently has a quite insufficient function in stewardship, planning, inspection, regulation and information.

Despite all the developments attained since the establishment of the Republic, the Turkish health system still faces major problems. Turkey still falls behind many high income and even middle income countries in terms of basic health indicators. Especially the rate of mother and child mortality as well as morbidity in the general sense is quite high in Turkey. Furthermore, there are major regional differences in nearly all health indicators across the country.

In order to improve the Turkish health system it is essential that, as the body responsible for first level health care, the MoH central organization is restructured.

The first thing that needs to get done is redefining the roles and functions of the Ministry in the field of health care. "Redefining" is a must as far as the success of "reconstructing" is concerned.

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