Implementation of Total Quality Management at Başkent University

Implementation of total quality management (TQM) in health care delivery systems has been well accepted in many countries and has brought continuous improvement in different areas of the health care delivery system, as well as controlling the rise of health care costs. Reports in a number of journals of successful implementation of TQM systems encouraged us at the University of Başkent to introduce this approach to continuous improvement in our health services in different health facilities of the University.

Başkent University, founded in 1993, has a 75-bed general hospital, Ankara Hospital, which gives high priority to health sciences programs. The University has two sister hospitals, one in Izmir Province and one in the Ayaş district of Ankara. Four hemodialysis centers of the University are also in operation in different provinces.

The TQM philosophy and process are based on a data-oriented system which requires the participation of all staff members in an organization. In January 1994, at the beginning of Başkent University’s implementation of a TQM process, the senior managers at Ankara Hospital were briefed about the importance of their commitment to the project. This was followed by a training program for mid-level managers, concentrating mostly on problem-solving methods. Subsequently, the staff in the clinical, laboratory and administrative departments of the hospital were included in the training program.

The training consisted of an overview of the philosophy and processes of TQM, including data collection, analysis of the data and problem-solving. Each group was taught about data collection processes and about analysis of this data, including how to use the information obtained as the basis for decision-making. Optimal standards for data collection were defined for each unit based on the structure of the organization and matched to the knowledge and skill levels of the staff. Mid-level managers, grouped into the quality circles they had formed, then conducted a thorough analysis of the data that had been collected and put forward appropriate alternatives for the solution of problems.

In order to ensure coordination between units and to allow for consultation during problem-solving sessions, a system of TQM was established within the University Hospital. All unit heads were asked to prepare monthly quality assurance reports, including a discussion of their findings and future plans to improve quality and efficiency in their units. The TQM Coordination Group assembled data from the units and presented them to the senior managers of the hospital at their monthly meeting.

By means of these reports, the senior managers were able to evaluate developments in the hospital, and the proposals of different units were discussed as an important source of information for decision-making.

Here are a few examples of early improvement efforts in some of our hospital units:

- In addition to the preparation of bills, the Patient Admissions Office in the hospital was given the task of collecting data about the number of admissions, the length of stay and the number of discharged patients.
- After implementation of the TQM system, problems regarding bed occupation rates...
and average length of stay were examined. This contributed to an important increase in the bed occupation and circulation rate.

- Problems caused by the preparation and collection of bills resulted in friction between the two departments responsible for these tasks. This problem was solved and cooperation was developed between the two departments by establishing connections between staff members with similar functions.
- Through analysis of data collected on an on-going basis, the purchasing unit learned that frequent and irregular request forms caused a problem for the main office and the stock control office. In order to find an appropriate solution to this problem, these units formed quality circles with representatives from each service which met on many occasions to discuss their findings. Through study of this issue, they were able to assess the needs of each unit and to arrange a schedule of delivery days. As a result of the new plan, the number of request forms in a week diminished from 27 to 16.

Similar examples could also be given from other units of the hospital.

Implementation of the TQM system has achieved the following successful results:

- Unit heads became more conscientious about improving quality and efficiency in their units.
- Hospital performance measurements showed significant improvements in bed occupancy rates and in operations performed.
- As a result of increased demand for services, additional out-patient facilities were annexed to a clinic currently in operation.
- Continuously rising bed occupancy rates played a significant role in the decision to start construction of a new hospital with a capacity of 100 beds.
- Successful results of the implementation in health services in the hospital units resulted in the introduction of a TQM system in the departments of higher education within the university.
- A nation-wide symposium, with the title “Changing Ideas and Approaches in Health Services Management”, was arranged by Başkent University in November 1994; it attracted a significant number of participants.
- A symposium book was published under the title “The Role of TQM in the Health Sector”, containing the speakers' presentations.

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