



Quality management

»What, another X-ray?« The patient is understandably annoyed, after all she had undergone an X-ray only the previous week as instructed by her GP. The answer is as succinct as it is typical – »Those X-rays are of no use to us. The doctor wants to see new ones.«

An isolated case? Most definitely not, after all in the German health service, there are many hands doing work for the good of the patient, however they are not always as well-coordinated and cost-optimised as you would expect, particularly when you bear in mind the current strained financial situation of the health insurance companies. But untenable situations such as these will hopefully soon be a thing of the past, because come 2004, all clinics must be able to furnish documentary proof that a functioning quality management system is in place. This is the intention of the Case Allowance Law, which came into force on 1st January 2003. The aim is not only to reduce costs, something which all sides have sworn to do, but also to modernise the entire medical management system. This is finally bringing some movement into the formerly somewhat crusted structures pre-

vailing in the German health service. »All rehabilitation and acute treatment clinics must now make a concerted effort if they want to continue to operate,« comments Dr. Hermann Mayer, senior consultant at the Hochried clinic in Murnau, the first clinic in Germany to receive DIN EN ISO 9001:2000 certification from TÜV Süddeutschland. Since 1994, Dr. Mayer has been involved in assessing quality management systems (QMS) in the medical sector, and he is quite confident when he says, »A well-functioning QMS is paramount for improving our health service, both now and in the future.« And a glance beyond the German border provides ample evidence. In neighbouring countries such as Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland are demonstrating well how to run an efficient medical provision system at considerably lower cost. Copying from your neighbour – is that the solution for



in the health service

the German health service? »Not automatically:« says Joachim Finklenburg, General Manager of the Gummersbach district hospital and President of the Cologne-Bonn hospital association. »Our system is not as poor as it is sometimes purported to be.« But there is still an urgent need for action in Germany, as far as the financial framework is concerned. Finklenburg, who is also a member of the various steering committees working on the theme of quality assurance, warns: »If you decree zero increases, you are not improving quality but worsening performance. In other countries, such as the USA, the clinics have other personnel and financial options at their disposal. This is something that has to be taken into account when making international comparisons.« In view of the continual cost increases, it appears unavoidable that a new way of thinking is introduced in Germany. But the move from theory to practice is anything but simple. »Many doctors have an eye on successful treatment but not on cost, when it comes to performing diagnosis, treatment and post-care,« says Joachim Finklenburg, »but this is something that has to change. »In future, treatment must be seen not only to be successful but also to be economically reasonable.« The next generation of doctors are additionally going to have to know how to function as managers. And not all doctors will find

it easy coping with this central requirement of quality management. This will have far-reaching consequences. For centuries, healing was seen as a hand craft, the success of which was largely dependent on the nature of the doctor. The modern mixture between doctor and manager is something which by no means all doctors can comply with, and this is no wonder when you consider that this is a sector in which the total mass of accumulated knowledge doubles every seven years! Nevertheless, the pressure on the doctors is increasing, because quality management, all the experts agree, will not stop at the GP and specialist practices. »This is why medical management must be integrated as quickly as possible into general medical training,« remarks Dr. Hermann Mayer.

The doctors at the Hochried clinic have been proving for a number of years that the new material can be learned. »Quality management must begin at management level, but its organisation must be structured precisely the other way round, i.e. from the bottom up,« says Dr. Mayer, explaining his recipe for success. In Murnau, the senior doctors are free to structure the quality management in their departments as they see fit, and the individual results are discussed openly in regular round table meetings and passed by majority vote. »This produces motivation and →

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Interview Prof. Dr. Peter Schaff

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? How does efficient quality management function in the health service?

! To put it briefly, the doctor decides what medicines are required to cure the patient and the management provides the appropriate resources. The organisation guarantees that all the interfaces work together smoothly. The consequence of this is that costs are reduced, patients are satisfied, and processes are rendered transparent, all of which serves to lower expenses and improve efficiency.

? Where does Germany rank in international comparison?

! From a medical point of view, Germany continues to occupy a top position. As far as efficiency and economy are concerned, Germany only manages a medium to low ranking. This is where we need to learn from other sectors of the economy as well as from other countries.

? What are the difficulties in implementing QM systems?

! The main factor is unwillingness to change. It is not only the hospital buildings which are today often a hundred or more years old but also often the administrative structures operating within them. And then there are many doctors who believe that quality management seeks to examine and even question their personal performance and skill – but that is not the point. The point is rather to render transparent the processes operating within the medical system so as to be able to instigate improvements and cut down costs.

? What developments do you expect for the future?

! The medical sector will develop more and more into a business. Pressure from additional laws will increase and only those suppliers will remain who are able to perform under the more stringent requirements, including those in quality and cost management.

creative freedom, which leads to tenable and measurable success.« All the decision making processes in the clinic go through this round table quality inspection process, which leads to transparency and comparability. Quality is not a coincidental by-product, but the result of a continuous work process. This is something that Joachim Finklenburg also knows. He predicts fundamental changes for the future of his sector. »The traditional model of the senior consultant will die out rapidly, to be replaced by a large number of specialists, cooperating via quality-optimised interfaces between and beyond various clinics and institutions. This is something which can only be achieved with modern quality management.«

And what will become of the patient in all these developments? Dr. Hermann Mayer knows the answer, because the patients in the Hochried clinic are questioned regularly over the course of their treatment. »The patient is the main beneficiary of the development, and he is in the centre of all the processes. His comments are of central importance and they flow directly into the management processes.«

TÜV Süddeutschland is to consistently implement quality management as laid down in the new ISO 9001:2000. Prof. Dr. Peter Schaff, Managing Director of TÜV Management Service GmbH, explains why. »This norm will allow us to offer a reliable and comprehensible instrument which has proven itself in the service sector and which has already been successfully implemented in 20 German clinics which have been given TÜV certification. Our experience has shown us that it makes sense to base one's activities on internationally recognised and comparable norms, in the medical sector too, rather than to move primarily within an exclusively national structure, and thereby to lose sight of the solution, which actually already exists. Anyone who equates the new DIN EN ISO 9001:2000 norm with the old ISO 9000, which was developed primarily with industry in mind, should order a copy of the document as quickly as possible, so that they can see for themselves just how well this process-oriented norm can be applied to the health service.« ■