Chapter 3
Public Reporting on Health and Social Care Services

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ABSTRACT

The growth of the healthcare sector has led to innovative ways to cater to consumers' needs, with some of the rich, developed countries at the forefront. An in-depth understanding of them enables a success-fully implemented and useful system for consumers. Public reporting is developed mainly for and around consumers. In this chapter, the authors take a general look at public reporting on health and social care services. They examine the existing reporting systems and the issues they encounter. There are significant benefits of public reporting on health and social care services, but we currently do not know the limits of such reporting. Citizens need such information services when deciding from there to acquire health and social care services for themselves or their families and relatives. Service providers need these information services for benchmarking purposes and for the development of their service offerings.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, we have observed several changes in the healthcare sector, which have been beneficial to all stakeholders involved. Developed nations are in the forefront of these advancements in healthcare, for instance, the use of technology in healthcare delivery at all levels. These advances in medicine and healthcare delivery have imposed a new type of demand for the availability of accurate and processed information in healthcare. It has also started the conversation on the patient's role in the effective delivery of healthcare. What is the patient's potential role in healthcare delivery? Can the patient be considered a consumer? What is consumer health informatics?

Eysenbach (2000) defines consumer health informatics as "*the branch of medical informatics that analyses consumer's need for information; studies and implements methods of making information accessible to consumers; and models and integrates consumers' preferences into medical information systems*" (p. 1713). Most industries are consumer driven, meaning that consumers have enough knowledge to make informed choices about products and services. Consumers use information technology to gain access to information that directly influences their decisions. Information systems are gradually becoming integral parts of modern healthcare services and policies in developed nations. Clearly, consumers will need and demand an unprecedented ability to access information and participate in their own healthcare. Consumers should have the choice and be able to judge the advantages and the disadvantages of all possible courses of action in relation to their health and according to their values, beliefs, preferences, and personal circumstances.

Over the past few years, we have witnessed the emergence and the growth of health tourism, electronic patient records, telemedicine, and web medicine. Information availability and use is an integral aspect of all these new additions to healthcare delivery. Public reporting on health and social care services is rooted in the availability of information. Access to insights on data and information is possible and in abundance now. It has become a catalyst of change in healthcare and social care delivery, wherein consumers have become the nucleus.

Various healthcare services and facilities are available to patients. The issue is how patients are choosing their healthcare and social care service providers. Researchers have conducted various studies on how patients make their health and social care service choices. It has been found that people make decisions in a fast and uncontrolled manner, without decision-making processes, and based on their experiences (Kumpunen, Trigg, & Rodrigues, 2014). Therefore, the health and social care services available to them have not been under serious scrutiny. This may affect the quality of provided services. These are the various reasons why public reporting on health and social care services is necessary. For public reporting to be useful to patients, there is the need for more than one care provider available per service (Kumpunen et al., 2014). Patients need to know about the availability of more health and social care service options.

The outcomes of public reporting on health and social care services are improved performance by providers, better quality of care, informed users, informed healthcare and social care choices for users, and hospital process improvements (Behrendt & Groene, 2016; Cacace et al., 2017; Maurer et al., 2016; Werner & Bradlow, 2010; Werner et al., 2009). However, public reporting has some negative aspects. Healthcare providers have the incentive to select patients for challenging healthcare treatments, as has been the case in the United States (US) (Behrendt & Groene, 2016; Cutler, Huckman, & Landrum, 2004; Narins, Dozier, Ling, & Zareba, 2005). Other challenges are accessibility, structuring, and presentation of information, as well as lack of prior experience. Based on existing literature and implemented systems, public reporting is used in measuring and comparing transparency, safety, quality, success rates, mortality rates, waiting times, health plans, and so on.

Studies have shown that the style of presenting information and access to information are important in reporting health and social care services. Data presentation enables the use of reported information. For public reporting to be successful, access to and use of information are of paramount importance. Data are gathered from all the various sources, analyzed, and published for consumers. How do consumers gain access to the published information or even understand what they read? The issue of access and understanding is another important element of public reporting that needs to be addressed. Readability, assimilation, and comprehension of information materials and the users' health literacy levels can create

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