
ACCREDITATION: POSSIBILITY OF ADVANCEMENT IN QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN HEALTHCARE AND NURSING?

For many years, healthcare institutions have been alienated from the globalized and competitive context of for-profit organizations geared towards the production of goods and services (industries, banks, hotels, etc.). However, given the scientific and technological advances, coupled with the increase in user demands, the healthcare field has been transforming itself and has adhered to an ever-growing movement towards quality management, understood as a group of principles, tools, and systemic and systematized processes aimed at continuously controlling and improving the quality of products/services.

With a heavy influence from business administration, the healthcare field has been incorporating quality management from an essentially strategic viewpoint, and this has imposed the need for mechanisms of continuous assessment. In the modern scenario of quality assessment in healthcare, what has most commonly been highlighted is that of Accreditation, which consists of a systematic, periodic, reserved, and, at times, voluntary process of the enhancement of healthcare services through the permanent education of an entire organization, the rationalization of work processes, and the comparison of the organizational reality, determined by pre-defined quality standards⁽¹⁾.

The Accreditation process contains certain peculiarities in each country and/or organization that manages the process. One example of this is the existence or lack of voluntary character (predominant in most countries), as is the case with France and partly with the United Kingdom, as well as in the providing of accreditation after assessment, which, in general, is more frequent. Other differences can be observed in the methodology and costs of the Accreditation process that, as in the case of the *Joint Commission International* (JCI), the most internationally renowned Accreditation agency, establishes stricter quality standards and higher costs when compared to the National Accreditation Organization (NCO), with headquarters in Brazil⁽¹⁾.

Even if one points out the differences in the methodology of the Accreditation process, what is more interesting is the fact that this has emerged as a favorable perspective towards the quality of national and international services, especially in the area of hospitals. Hence, Accreditation benefits are related to the management of the work process, which is made feasible through interdisciplinarity, effective communication throughout an organization, care provided based on user needs and expectations, and strict compliance with quality standards⁽²⁾.

Even if Accreditation is recognized as a favorable means through which to manage service quality, there are still gaps to be explored for this system to consolidate itself in the daily management and care provided at hospitals and other healthcare services. Within such gaps, in the Brazilian context, there is a clear need to elucidate the cost/benefit relationship of the Accreditation process as well as its impact on indicators of the quality of structures, processes, and results. In this endeavor, the Nurse is undoubtedly the professional who works within a vast field. In addition to being recognized as a member of the healthcare team that most adheres to the principles that guide quality management, he/she is also responsible for the nursing team, which consists of the largest contingent of professionals from healthcare institutions. Moreover, the nurse is the only category that, in an uninterrupted manner, remains together with the customer/patient 24 hours a day within the hospital environment.

Given that explained above, it can be concluded that the Accreditation process in healthcare institutions seems to be of great value in the quest for quality, since, under the principles that guide it, the guarantee (or at least the improvement) of quality in medical care provided to users tends to be more efficient and effective.

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