

Public Health Issues in Albania

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ABSTRACT

In respect of actual healthcare situation in Albania, mostly referring to the low level of healthcare services as well as to broad issues pertaining to the public health sector, we have obtained a specific topic not yet delivered from the Albanian researchers of the field, aiming that we can modestly help in the clarification of the situation as it has been often camouflaged in the needs of political powers. According to the researches made on this topic it seems to be the actual healthcare trend of developments in Europe and not only. Due to the latest context we believe that in order to bring a fair approach in the Albanian situation the integration of medical and economic sciences is a must. Thus, the paper considers evidences regarding the legal framework from the healthcare sector in Albania and compares them with the respective demand and legal framework in European Community aiming as a final goal the exploration of opportunities which can bring a better perspective in the country. For the previously mentioned reasons we have interviewed specialists of the field such as: well known doctors, experienced administrators in public hospitals and ordinary staff as they face every day different issues.

- ✓ On behalf of the research made the paper concludes:
- ✓ On policies and strategies needed to improve the services in the healthcare public sector;
- ✓ On the expansion of the financial resource base and increase funding for public health;
- ✓ On strengthening the managerial capacity of healthcare institutions through the implementation of contemporary models in health management in order to establish the patient in the bottom of the Albanian healthcare system.

1. Introduction

Driven by the real situation of the health market in Albania, by the low level of the health service, by the wide and versatile problem of the public health sector, I thought of dealing with a difficult research topic, very little studied by Albanian science, with the belief that I will help in a modest way, in clarifying the situation in this sector, often camouflaged for the needs of power and politics.

I am convinced that the topic I have chosen carries a wide and very interesting problem in the field of health services in Albania. It is part of the trend of contemporary developments in Europe and beyond. I also think that in the chosen topic, medical sciences will be optimally harmonized with economic sciences, making a contribution, I hope original, in the field of health management in Albania. (Frank HR and Bernanke SB 2004).

Simply put, my scientific research will have one foot in the medical sciences and another in the economic sciences. In the topic I have chosen, I hope I have provided some interesting information that will help in the detailed knowledge of the health market in Albania. Knowing the situation has led us to valuable conclusions and considerations which I hope will help in finding new ways and opportunities for significant improvements in Albanian health.

The objectives of the study are the result of an extensive consultation, developed in advance, with specialists in the field. I have consulted many issues with well-known doctors, with experienced administrators who have managed public health problems in several hospitals in Albania for years (Hysa B, 2004).

2. Knowing the Real State of the Health Market in Albania

Here I have stopped and analyzed the meaning of the Health Market, the constituent elements of this market and especially the main public and private actors who carry on their shoulders the progress of the health service in the country.

During the study, constant contacts with people, with the various institutions of the health system, I had the good fortune to get to know in detail the problems of TSHSH, expanding the horizon on the immediate and perspective needs, in the Albanian health service.

I have carefully observed the level occupied by Albanian health in the state budget, I have compared with the countries of the region and more broadly with the countries of the European Community, concluding that in order to get out of the situation immediately, we need to triple the amount of Investments in the field of medicine from the budget of the Albanian state. We can leave other things undone, but the health of the people must be superimposed on all other needs.

The identification of the problems of the health system in Albania in a special way constitutes an important part of the study. I am convinced that in order to write towards the solution, towards the strengthening of the health system and the achievement of European standards in this field, the first thing we must do is to recognize and reflect the problems of the health sector. Their collection and presentation in studies of of this type, is of particular importance.

Some of them, the ones that I have considered the most important, I have presented in my study.

For the problem to be solved, we need to answer two main questions:

1. What should we do?
2. What programs should we design to get out of the situation?

Evidence of the Albanian government's policies and strategies for strengthening services in the public sector, especially in the health sector.

3. Some Problems of Financing the Health Sector in Albania

Another important objective of the study, which is the result of the identification of the problems of the functioning of the health sector in Albania, is the assessment of the financing situation of this sector and the provision of some modest recommendations on the expansion of the base of financial resources as well as the increase of public funds for Health.

*Strengthening the managerial capacities of health institutions through the creation of contemporary models of health management. The good functioning of health institutions and the provision of a quality service to patients is closely related to the way these institutions are managed. The proper selection of managers, based on their managerial skills and not on their party affiliation or technical skills in the field of medicine, is an important condition to guarantee a good performance on their part, and therefore health institutions that act in accordance with the appropriate standards and serve the population best.

4. Methodology of the Work

The scientific work is based on the basic principles of health economics. It includes the post-communist period 2000-2015. Our conclusions are drawn from the real state of the health market in Albania as well as from the data of health institutions specialized in this field.

According to contemporary authors, the methods used in the field of research are quantitative, qualitative and mixed. In our study, I relied on mixed methods, which we consider as a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. We rely on the collection and processing of quantitative data, without which it is difficult to accurately reflect the reality, in our case the state of the health market in Albania. In this case, statistical analyzes and results increase the possibility to get to know the situation better and to reach accurate conclusions. (Author, 2016).

On the other hand, the use of qualitative methods has helped us to analyze the psychological and spiritual factors that have a significant impact on the current state of the health system in the country.

We have also reflected the impact of competition in Health, public and private factors, the impact of politics on health, the economic level of the people, the high level of corruption in this sector, etc. We have also classified influencing factors into internal and external factors.

5. Research Questions and Study Hypotheses

The main argument for taking on this topic and carrying out this work is the poor situation in the Albanian

health service. The goal is to know the situation as well as the ways and opportunities for the modernization of the health market in Albania. It is important to understand that the knowledge of the health market in Albania, and the many problems that it carries, is not an end in itself. We have studied it in order to better know the ways and opportunities for improving the situation. This can be achieved through the most optimal combination of the key variables on which it depends.

In accordance with this goal, the following three research questions were also presented:

1. What do we mean by the term health market and what is the health market in Albania?
2. What are the current problems of the health market (detailed knowledge and their classification)?
3. What are the current challenges, paths and opportunities for improving the situation and increasing the health service towards the standards of the European Union?

As will be noted during the explanation of the paper below, the problems that characterize the health system in Albania today are numerous, as well as the factors that cause these problems. But, for the purposes of this paper, our attention will be focused more on the issues of financing the health sector and those of the management of health service institutions. For this reason, the three hypotheses that have been raised within this study are as follows:

Hypothesis 1. The health market in Albania is characterized by a series of problems, which must be known in advance and in detail, before taking steps to improve the situation and reach European standards.

Hypothesis 2. It is necessary to expand the financing base of the health sector from public funds.

Hypothesis 3. It is necessary to strengthen the managerial structures in health institutions through the creation of contemporary models of health management.

6. Some Problems in Health Service Management

Considering the problem of health management in the country as a whole, we have tried to highlight the problems of this sector, which we will briefly present and comment on below:

First, we can say that since the organizational structures of the hospital have not been clearly planned, the placement of health profile managers in the management of these institutions.

Placing in the organizational structure, in the direction of the health service instead of health management specialists, would significantly inhibit the arrival of professional doctors in the direction of the work due to the fact that they have insufficient knowledge in the field of health management.

Secondly, we must fight with a common political will so that in the direction of Albanian health, people with deep knowledge, in the field of management and not party militants, come.

Thirdly, the design of interdepartmental programs to create all training opportunities for new health service managers from Albanian universities.

Fourth, to grant special scholarships for elite students to be sent to Western Universities, to be scientifically trained in the field of modern management.

7. The Management of the Health System is Not Built in Accordance with the Needs of the Health Service in the Country.

During the contacts with different citizens, with professional doctors and managers of hospitals, and others; from the numerous information collected in five districts of Albania, the argument prevails in many cases that the management and good administration of the health service is decisive in the quality of services to the people. In summary, we have selected some of the main causes of the condition.

The following factors have influenced the current situation:

1. The lack of real managers, prepared for the administration and management of work in the hospital service.
2. Shortages in the supply of the necessary material base, and especially the supply of materials for daily needs and medicines, is still far from the required standards. From the tests carried out and media

investigations, materials and medicines have been found to be expired or on the verge of expiry. In many cases, supplies are made by preferential firms, close to the current heads of institutions, with close ties to politics.

3. In many cases, party militants with deficient professional and cultural training are placed in the direction of work from the wards or departments to the top of the hospital service pyramid.
4. In other cases, in the management of health service affairs, professionals are appointed who, under these conditions, are left without performing their professional duties towards patients and at the same time, do not manage the management problems at a level for the simple reason that they do not are specialists in this field.

8. Recommendations Regarding the Improvement of Managerial Structures in the Health System.

The profession of health manager will be created through these ways:

1. Stimulation and absorption of professionals trained abroad in management positions who currently work outside the state health system
2. Increasing the number of personnel trained abroad with binding contracts to return and serve in the country.
3. Preparation of managers from the School of Public Health and Health Management, which will be created in the country.
 - a. The managerial capacities of primary health care doctors will be strengthened. Primary care professionals must learn the basic notions of managing people, finances and services.

For this purpose, training courses with micro-management techniques of primary care services will be built and institutionalized, to respond to the concrete needs of these services in Albania. The training courses will be implemented, first in the region of Tirana, where the World Bank project is providing assistance in this direction. Afterwards, it will be institutionalized with the aim of offering it continuously throughout the country.

- b. The managerial capacities of health leaders at different levels will be strengthened, such as Regional health authorities, leaders at the district or county level, national health institutions, etc.
 - c. Hospital management capacities will be strengthened through these measures:
4. Elaboration of a new model of the "autonomous hospital" within the year 2005.

This model will be elaborated and implemented first in the regional hospital of Durrës, furthering the started initiative. The mechanisms of hospital autonomy will also be elaborated to be implemented in the University Hospital Center of Tirana.

Elaboration of a "new model of hospital management", suitable for the conditions of hospitals in Albania. This model will include:

- Balanced organizational structure with 2 poles, medical and managerial. The medical director and his staff will solve the technical problems while the manager and his staff will manage the financial and material resources.
- Functional decentralization within the hospital, where each service has autonomy in the management of all resources (also financial).
- Establishment of simultaneous clinical and financial information systems as necessary requirements for effective management.
- Collective decision-making by making hospital management boards functional and responsible.

The School of Public Health and Health Management will be established, which will enable the continuous education of new staff in the fields of health services management.

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