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Good managers for good health services

This article outlines progress in the preparation of nurses, doctors and other professionals for managerial roles in the health services of several Caribbean countries. It is expected that there will be solid gains in effectiveness and efficiency during the next few years as the new managers' influence is felt and that the prospects for primary care and health for all will consequently be enhanced.

The need for managers and administrators in the health sectors of various Caribbean territories was foreseen in the late 1940s by senior colonial officials. Little was done for many years, however, and those who did receive management training were educated overseas in programmes that had scant bearing on conditions in Caribbean societies. In many countries the health sectors functioned in ways described by their own personnel as inefficient and ineffective, yet many resisted the idea of management training, citing examples of smooth operation within their organizations. They also stated that doctors had no time to be trained as managers, thus confronting the advocates of management training with the assumption that health teams could only be managed by doctors. Many in the health sectors pointed to problems of service delivery. Despite some advances, performance was not optimal because of management problems.

The difficulties of running the health services of the Caribbean vary from country to country. In Jamaica, financing the health sector is a major problem. Inadequate funds mean that there are shortages of drugs and other medical supplies in the public hospitals and that up-to-date equipment is scarce or unavailable. These problems are compounded by the steady exodus from the sector of doctors, registered nurses and other health professionals.

Weaknesses

At the 1978 Caribbean Health Ministers' Conference, management problems were identified as the principal health issue. The ministers noted that there were serious weaknesses in the management of the health services, in the availability of trained staff, in the suitability of training, and in the supply and maintenance of facilities. The time had arrived for the exposure of all types of personnel to structural programmes of health services management if improved planning, organization, motivation, direction and control were to be realized. As a rule,

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public health inspectors, nurses and other health workers had not been trained to provide effective and efficient management.

Yet in practice all categories of health workers become involved in management. The required mix of management-related skills varies with the type of staff. Thus a director of nursing needs to be versed particularly in human and conceptual skills, whereas a nursing supervisor or head nurse should be skilled above all else in technical areas. Doctors, health inspectors, public health nurses and, indeed, all other professional groups in the health sector also need managers in their ranks.

Early training opportunities

During the 1960s, short courses for health staff aimed at improving administration were conducted under the auspices of the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Extramural Department of the University of the West Indies. An advanced nursing education programme, established in 1966, sought to prepare middle-level administrators and managers for hospitals and health agencies as well as tutors for schools of nursing. The Department of Government at the University introduced programmes which, although not designed

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specifically for health workers, provided many of them with training in public administration. The Department of Management Studies initiated a programme for middle and senior managers which also

attracted some senior health personnel, and since 1977 the Administrative Staff College of Jamaica has been presenting general management and project management programmes of benefit to health workers.

Specialist training

In 1984 a programme was introduced at the University of the West Indies in which the trainees, selected from a wide range of categories of health staff, were exposed to an integrated type of educational experience (1). The Diploma in Health Management reflects changes that have occurred in the thinking of planners about the needs of the health sector. The programme can be taken on a full-time basis for one year or on a part-time basis for two years. This is an important landmark, the result of years of negotiation, planning and integration at several levels. The programme is jointly run by the Faculties of Medical Sciences and Social Sciences and teaching is provided by a multidisciplinary team. Among the 22 persons initially selected to participate there were five physicians, two hospital matrons, a health educator, an economist, and individuals from a wide range of middle and senior management positions in various Caribbean ministries of health.

The programme includes features that are not usually all combined in courses taught at the University of the West Indies: student workshops; modular division of the five main courses; utilization of a small number of lecturers from another university; participation of experienced health managers from the Jamaican health sector as part-time lecturers; and a three-week field placement.

According to an evaluation made in 1985, the programme presents appropriate academic exposure for middle and senior administrators, and the students are well

qualified and have relevant experience and the potential for making a significant long-term contribution to the health management system. All of the first group of participants planned to return to their employers, a good sign for health management in the region. It was anticipated by 15% of the participants that they would be promoted on returning to their jobs. The other trainees did not appear to be unduly concerned about the lack of immediate prospects of advancement.

In addition to equipping the students with management skills, the programme opened their minds to the importance of education. When asked about what they expected to be doing five years after gaining the diploma, five of the thirteen students who were full-time in the first cycle said they saw themselves doing postgraduate work in health administration, three hoped to become involved in teaching health management and active in health service research, three desired to provide in-service training for health ministry staff, one wished to be promoted from senior public health nurse to nursing supervisor, and one, already occupying a senior post, had no desire for change. Students who already had first degrees and senior positions were generally the ones who wished to go on to further studies or become involved in research. Those who were not very senior desired to achieve promotion and increased responsibility by becoming attached to in-service programmes for junior members of health teams.

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cannot remain static if it is to be efficient and effective. One programme for a bachelor's degree in nursing and another for a master's degree in public health have already been introduced in the University of the West Indies.

It is envisaged that the newly trained managers will, during the next five years, begin to have a significantly favourable impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of the health sectors of various Caribbean countries, and thus contribute to primary care and the achievement of health for all. □

Reference

1. **Rawlins, J. M. & Maharaj, S.** Learning health management by doing it. *World health forum*, **8**: 511-515 (1987).