

Improving Accountability in a Decentralised System: A Swedish Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In Sweden health care is financed through public means by county-council taxes. The care is delivered either by institutions run by the county councils or in an increasing proportion by private organisations often owned by the county councils but in a few cases owned as a public company. The National Board of Health and Welfare is independent from the Ministry of Health and not politically run. The National Board has two tasks : 1- to issue normative material stating the basis for evidence based medicine and good practice; and 2- to perform surveillance of institutions providing health care or medical services and of authorized personnel.

Swedish legislation states that health care and medical services shall be of good quality and given on equal terms to all people. One way to ensure this is formulated in the Code of Statutes of the National Board of Health and Welfare of 1997."Continuous and systematic quality assurance and improvement shall be implemented in all medical and dental services." As of 1998 a similar regulation concerning the care of the elderly is in effect.

The basis is self evaluation but the Code contains criteria for documentation and traceability that fulfill the needs of surveillance. When surveying clinical institutions the National Board refers to the Code of Statutes. The institution will then present material for benchmarking and comparisons. For about 45 conditions such comparative material is available on a national level through the various Quality Registers. For about 10 major clinical conditions comprising about 70% of disease burden, National Clinical Guidelines based on evidence based medicine criteria and complemented with aspects on priority settings are or will be available for setting a Swedish standard.

A follow up legislation on the Code of Statutes is planned. The objective of this new legislation is that results from a patient, professional and organisational perspective has to be openly reported on an annual basis. The general idea is that through this set-up foreseeable surveillance, the outcome of which is predictable, might be possible to be achieved.