CARING FOR QUALITY IN HEALTH

LESSONS LEARNT FROM 15 REVIEWS OF HEALTH CARE QUALITY

OECD

BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

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Foreword

This synthesis report draws on key lessons from the *OECD Health Care Quality Review* series. As health costs continue to climb, policy makers increasingly face the challenge of ensuring that substantial spending on health is delivering value for money. At the same time, concerns about patients occasionally receiving poor-quality health care have led to demands for greater transparency and accountability. Despite this, considerable uncertainty still remains over i) which policies work best in delivering safe, effective health care that provides a good patient experience, and ii) which quality-improvement strategies can help deliver the best care at the least cost.

The objective of this report is to summarise the main challenges and good practices so as to support improvements in health care quality and to help ensure that the substantial resources devoted to health are used effectively in supporting people to live healthier lives. The findings presented in this synthesis report were assembled through a systematic review of the policies and institutions described in each *OECD Health Care Quality Review,* to identify common challenges, responses and leading-edge practices. This material was complemented by OECD health statistics and other OECD reports where appropriate.

The overarching conclusion emerging across the *OECD Health Care Quality Review* series concerns transparency. Governments should encourage, and where appropriate require, health care systems and health care providers to be open about the effectiveness, safety and patient-centredness of care they provide. More measures of patient outcomes are needed (especially those reported by patients themselves), and these should underpin standards, guidelines, incentives and innovations in service delivery. Greater transparency can lead to optimisation of both quality and efficiency – twin objectives that reinforce, rather than subvert, each other. In practical terms, greater transparency and better performance can be supported by making changes in where and how care is delivered; by modifying the roles of patients and professionals, and by more effectively employing tools such as data and incentives. Key actions in these three areas are set out in the 12 lessons presented in this synthesis report.

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The opinions expressed in the paper are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the OECD or its member countries

Table of contents

Acronyms and abbreviations 6

Introduction 7

Systemic changes on where and how health care is delivered will optimise both quality and efficiency 11

Lesson 1: High-performing health care systems offer primary care as a specialist service that provides comprehensive care to patients with complex needs 12

Lesson 2: Patient-centred care requires more effective primary and secondary prevention in primary care 17

Lesson 3: High-quality mental health care systems require strong health information systems and mental health training in primary care 20

Lesson 4: New models of shared care are required to promote co-ordination across health and social care systems 24

Health care systems need to engage patients as active players in improving health care, while modernising the role of health professionals 29

Lesson 5: A strong patient voice is a priority to keep health care systems focussed on quality when financial pressures are acute 30

Lesson 6: Measuring what matters to people delivers the outcomes that patients expect 33

Lesson 7: Health literacy helps drive high-value care 36

Lesson 8: Continuous professional development and evolving practice maximise the contribution of health professionals 39

Health care systems need to better employ transparency and incentives as key quality-improvement tools 43

Lesson 9: High-performing health care systems have strong information infrastructures that are linked to quality-improvement tools 44

Lesson 10: Linking patient data is a pre-requisite for improving quality across pathways of care 48

Lesson 11: External evaluation of health care organisation needs to be fed into continuous quality-improvement cycles 51

Lesson 12: Improving patient safety requires greater effort to collect, analyse and learn from adverse events 53

Conclusions 57

Acronyms and abbreviations

CME	Continuous medical education
CPD	Continuous professional development
EHR	Electronic health record
FFS	Fee-for-service
GP	General practitioner
ICP	Individual care plan
LTC	Long-term condition
NHS	National Health Service
P4P	Pay-for-performance
PCIC	Patient-centred integrated care
PCP	Primary care practitioner
PIP	Practice Incentives Programme
PREM	Patient-reported Experience Measure
PRIM	Patient-reported Incident Measure
PROM	Patient-reported Outcome Measure
QOF	Quality and Outcomes Framework
ULS	*Unidade Local de Saude*

Introduction

Between 2012 and 2016, the OECD conducted a series of in-depth reviews of the policies and institutions that underpin the measurement and improvement of health care quality in 15 different health care systems (Australia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Northern Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Scotland, Sweden, Turkey and Wales). The 15 settings examined are highly diverse, encompassing the high-tech, hospital-centric systems of Japan and Korea, the community-focussed Nordic systems, the unique challenges of Australia's remote outback, and the historically underfunded systems of Turkey and the Czech Republic, now undergoing rapid modernisation. What unites these and all other OECD health care systems, however, is that all increasingly care about quality.

In a time of multiple, unprecedented pressures on health care systems – many of which are beyond health care systems' control – central and local governments as well as professional and patient groups are renewing their focus on one issue that they can control and one priority that they equally share: health care quality and outcomes. In the OECD's work to measure and improve health care system performance, health care quality is understood to comprise three dimensions: effectiveness, safety and patient-centredness (or responsiveness).

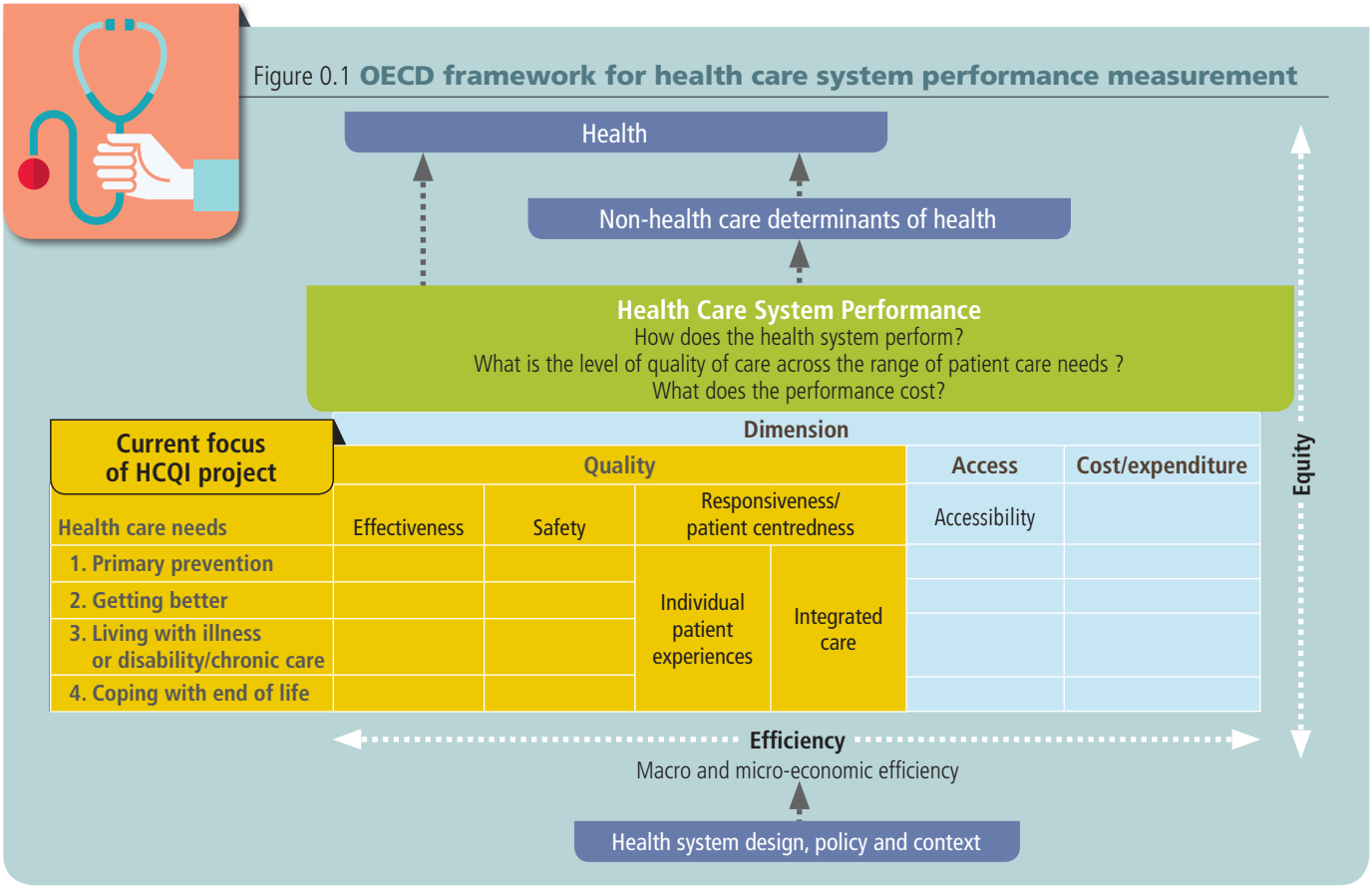


Figure 0.1 **OECD framework for health care system performance measurement**

Source: Carinci, F. et al. (2015), "Towards Actionable International Comparisons of Health System Performance: Expert Revision of the OECD Framework and Quality Indicators", *International Journal for Quality in Health Care,* Vol. 27, No. 2, pp. 137-146, http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/intqhc/mzv004.

These dimensions are applied across the key stages of the care pathway: staying well (preventive care), getting better (acute care), living with illness or disability (chronic care) and care at the end of life (palliative care). This conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 0.1.

To facilitate the provision of high-quality care, governments and professional and patient groups use a consistent set of tools (shown in Table 0.1), such as standardisation of clinical practices, monitoring of capabilities, reports on performance or accreditation of health care organisations. The way these tools are shaped and used varies, rightly, from system to system depending on local needs and traditions. In some systems, regulation is relatively light-touch; in others, regulatory activities such as accreditation and licensing follow lengthy and detailed protocols.

Table 0.1 **Key policies and institutions that influence health care quality**

Policy	Examples
Health system design	Accountability of actors, allocation of responsibilities, legislation
Health system inputs (professionals, organisations, technologies)	Professional licensing, accreditation of health care organisations, quality assurance of drugs and medical devices
Health system monitoring and standardisation of practice	Measurement of quality of care, national standards and guidelines, national audit studies and reports on performance
Improvement (national programmes, hospital programmes and incentives)	National programme on quality and safety, pay for performance in hospital care, examples of improvement programmes within institutions

Despite differences in health care system priorities, and in how quality-improvement tools are designed and applied, a number of common approaches emerged across the 15 *OECD Reviews* of *Health Care Quality* analysed. Likewise, a number of shared challenges became apparent. This report seeks to answer the question of what caring for quality means for a modern health care system by distilling 12 key lessons from the 15 reviews published over the last five years. The report identifies what policies and approaches work best in improving quality of care and provides guidance to policy makers on the actions that they can take to improve health care quality. A second, equally important purpose is to identify unresolved gaps and challenges in health care systems' progress towards continuous monitoring and improvement of quality across all sectors, for all patient groups.

Health care system governance should focus on using transparency to steer performance, through continuous plan-do-study-act cycles, at national as well as at local level. Greater focus on patient outcomes is particularly important, and this can support optimisation of both quality and efficiency.

A key priority is to encourage, and where appropriate require, health care systems and health care providers to be open about the effectiveness, safety and patient-centredness of care they provide. Health care system governance should focus on using transparency to steer performance, through continuous plan-do-study-act cycles, at national as well as at local level. Greater focus on patient outcomes is particularly important, and this can support optimisation of both quality and efficiency. Twelve policy actions or lessons illustrate how, in practical terms. The first four address the need for systemic changes on where and how care is delivered.

The importance of placing the primary care sector at the forefront of the health care system to deliver pro-active, co-ordinated care, especially for patients living with one or more chronic conditions, is stressed. Lessons 5-8 explore the changing role of stakeholders, notably the role of the patients and of health professionals to deliver high-value and safe care. The final four lessons address the data and incentive structures that should be aligned to outcomes and quality of care to guarantee the accountability and transparency necessary for a more efficient health care system.

Approaches to quality monitoring and improvement are divergent. Some systems (the Czech Republic, England and Turkey, for example), while taking into account views of local stakeholders, emphasise quality management and quality control largely designed by central authorities. Other systems (Italy, Norway and Scotland, for example), prioritise quality-improvement activities, characterised by plan-do-study-act cycles at local level. The correct balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches will depend upon political traditions and priorities, and can be difficult to judge. In any arrangement, however, two key ingredients are needed to drive sustainable change.

The first is a quality culture among both clinicians and service managers, to encourage continuously better and safer care. Ways to encourage a culture of continuous quality improvement include educational measures, feedback on performance, and learning and sharing from good practices. This is essential to change behaviour and to seek opportunities for quality improvement. Such activities appeared weaker in some health care systems including the Czech Republic, Korea and Turkey, where demonstrations of quality monitoring and improvement were not as developed as in other OECD countries. In this case, it is essential to assure that the intent of quality initiatives is not punitive for health professionals, but rather to share knowledge and learn from experiences to then drive quality improvements. This is crucial to build a culture of quality.

The second ingredient is a clear accountability framework. This entails a role for central authorities to: set system-wide priorities; provide a nationally consistent approach to measure them; identify excellence; and support poor performers. Yet consistent steering from central authorities is lacking in some systems, such as Italy and Australia. The review of country experiences suggests that ambitious quality-improvement programmes can fail to deliver expected results in a system characterised by a weak accountability framework with fragmented leadership. At the same time, sufficient space for local innovations to improve care quality must be maintained.

Systemic changes on where and how health care is delivered will optimise both quality and efficiency

All OECD health care systems need to gear themselves for an ageing population, which is most often associated with an increased prevalence of long-term conditions (LTC) such as diabetes or hypertension. In many cases, the elderly population suffers from multiple chronic conditions simultaneously. Such socio-demographic and epidemiologic challenges place increasing pressure on the health sector, calling for better prevention and more effective management of chronic diseases. The transition towards chronic and LTCs also requires a comprehensive approach, supporting patient-centred integrated care (PCIC), which is a means to optimise both quality and efficiency. Strengthening primary care is a fundamental way of shifting the focus to PCIC, but it will also be a key element to improving quality care for mental health disorders, which often co-exist with other LTCs.

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

1 High-performing health care systems offer primary care as a specialist service that provides comprehensive care to patients with complex needs

Across OECD countries, the population aged over 65 years increased from less than 9% in 1960 to 16% in 2014; and it is expected to nearly double in the next four decades to reach 27% in 2050. At the same time, nearly 65% of those aged 65-84 are estimated to have more than one chronic condition, a prevalence that reaches 89% for those aged 85 and over.

Given the growing ageing population and the rising prevalence of multimorbidities, it is widely accepted that hospitals are neither the best settings to provide preventive care nor from which to manage multiple and complex care needs. It makes clinical and economic sense for health care systems to rebalance services towards community-based primary care. Stronger primary care requires investing in key functions of primary care (comprehensiveness, care co-ordination and care continuity), shifting care out of costly inpatient services and developing a rich information infrastructure to underpin quality monitoring and improvement (Figure 1.1).

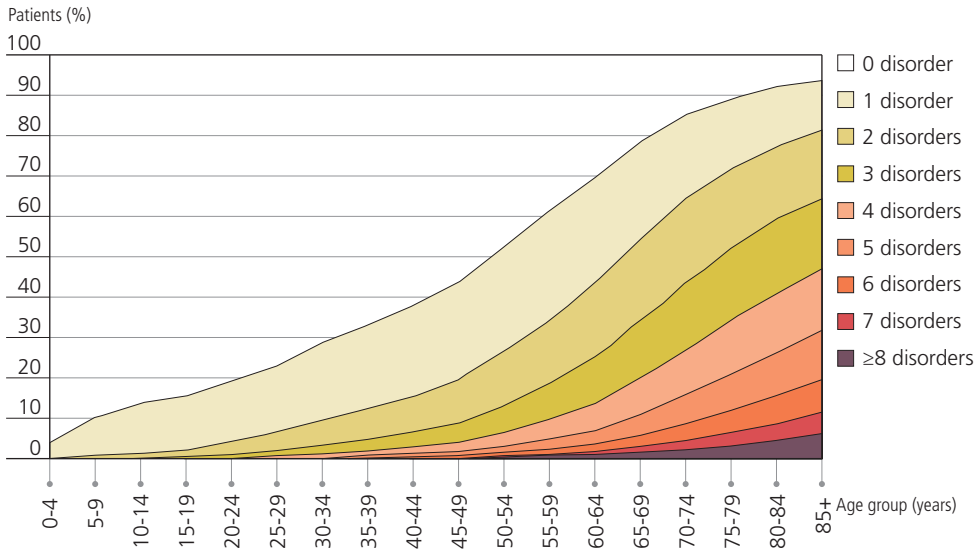
Investing in key functions of primary care

Primary care is critical to provide effective, co-ordinated care for patients with multiple needs. While no one single dimension of primary care exists, a large body of evidence finds that comprehensiveness, care co-ordination and care continuity are essential functions to deliver high-quality and efficient health care (Kringos et al., 2015; Starfield, 1994, 2005). In practical terms, this means that primary care constitutes the first point of call, serving as a co-ordinating hub for complex patient care, with the ability to refer patients to secondary care when necessary. It also strives to provide care that is person- rather than disease-focused, and entails a long-term clinical relationship with patients.

Delivering such a model of care is not an easy task. OECD countries have taken different paths to provide it (Table 1.1). Several OECD countries established a patient registration system to favour care continuity. In the Czech Republic, Denmark, Italy, Norway and Portugal, patients are required to register with a regular primary care practitioner (PCP). Some health care systems went a step beyond and introduced a gatekeeping or referral system to achieve greater care co-ordination. In Australia, Denmark, Israel, Italy, Norway, Portugal and the United Kingdom, access to a specialist is available only by referral from a PCP.

Investing in a specialist primary care workforce is also fundamental to developing a strong primary care system. In the context of population ageing, where a growing number of individuals have multiple and complex care needs, a specialist primary care sector with a comprehensive and patient-centred orientation is especially needed. Firm evidence suggests

Figure 1.1 **The prevalence of multimorbidity is increasing with age**



Source: Adapted from Barnett, K. et al. (2012), "Epidemiology of Multimorbidity and Implications for Health Care, Research, and Medical Education: A Cross-sectional Study", *The Lancet,* Vol. 380, No. 9836, pp. 37-43.

the benefits of having a specialist primary care workforce (Masseria et al., 2009). Not only does a specialist workforce promote the health and well-being of the population, it also contributes to better quality, co-ordination, responsiveness and cost-effectiveness of health care services, particularly with respect to the management of LTCs (Shi et al., 2002; Boerma et al., 1998; Kringos et al., 2010; Thorlby, 2013; Goodwin et al., 2011). Almost all health care systems reviewed have invested in a specialist primary care workforce (Table 1.1). In Turkey for example, the 2005 *Health Transformation Programme* reinvigorated the specialty of family medicine. Since then, nearly all Turkish medical schools include departments of family medicine that supervise specialty training over three years, leading to a post-graduate diploma in family medicine (OECD, 2014a). By contrast, Japan was lagging behind the other OECD countries, with no specialist training in general practice or family medicine. However, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare is taking steps in the right direction. General practitioners are now recognised as primary care specialists and a distinct training in general practice will start from 2018.

The Czech Republic, Japan, Korea and Turkey demonstrate weaknesses in their current primary care arrangements. Common to these countries is a lack of strong primary care to be responsible for co-ordinating prevention, investigation and treatment of health care needs, and to steer demand for secondary care. England, Norway and Denmark are internationally recognised for their strong primary care sectors, with care co-ordination a key function of general practice.

To build a strong primary health care foundation capable of delivering a wide range of pro-active and patient-centred health services, all OECD health care systems need to continue developing primary care as a specialist community-based service that offers comprehensiveness, continuity and co-ordination to patients with complex needs.

England, Norway and Denmark are internationally recognised for their strong primary care sectors, with care co-ordination a key function of general practice.

Table 1.1 **Key functions of primary care**

	Is gatekeeping or referral system to access most types of specialist care?	Do patients have to register with PCPs or family physicians?	Is there post-training requirement to become GP, family physician or PCP ?
Australia	Yes	Optional	Yes, there is post-graduate training programme in general practice.
Czech Republic	No	Required	Yes, there is post-graduate training programme in general practice.
Denmark	Yes	Required	Yes, there is post-graduate training programme in general practice.
Israel	Yes	Not required	Yes, there is a family practice residency programmes.
Italy	Yes	Required	Yes, there is a post-graduate programme of three years to achieve the speciality of general practice.
Japan	No	Not required	No, primary care has been delivered by a cadre of semi generalist/ semi specialists with no compulsory training. The country, however, plan to introduce a new specialist training in general practice from 2018.
Korea	No	Not required	Yes, there is a specific specialisation in "family medicine".
Norway	Yes	Required	Yes, here is specialist training in general practice (undergone by 60% of GPs in Norway).
Portugal	Yes	Required	Yes, there is a general practice and family medicine speciality.
Sweden	No	Optional	Yes, Swedish GPs are medical specialists in family medicine.
Turkey	No	Not required	Yes, family medicine is a post-graduate training programme since the Health Transformation Programme (with the family practitioner scheme)
United Kingdom	Yes	Not required	Yes, there is a post-graduate specialty in the field of general practice.

Source: OECD Secretariat based on the series of *OECD Reviews of Health Care Quality*.

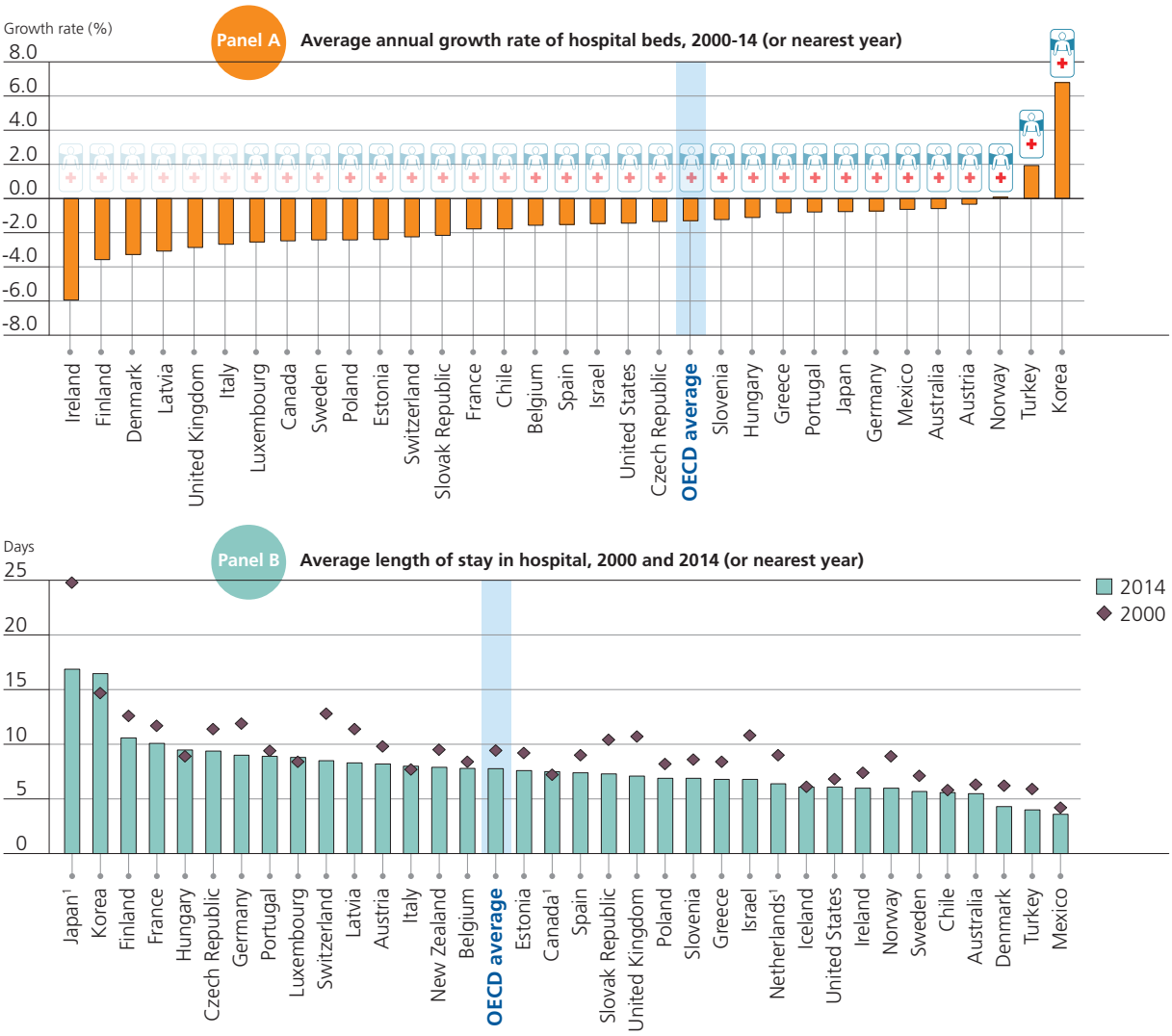
Shifting treatment towards primary and community care settings

Stronger primary care may be a means to contain health spending, by shifting care away from costly inpatient services. Many factors determine where care occurs. An important determinant (beyond patient preferences) is the availability of services in the community to prevent hospital admissions or to continue a patient's care after discharge. Availability of co-ordinated and high-quality community care was reported to be poor or inconsistent in Japan, Korea, Portugal and Turkey. These countries have above-average acute care capacities and lag behind the OECD average with long average length of hospital stay or low discharge rates. They are pursuing policies to reduce dependence on the hospital sector but progress in this area is still slow.

Although there is an observable trend in OECD countries to reduce the number of hospital beds available and length of hospital stays (Figure 1.2), investment in primary care may not be happening fast enough at a time when the burden of disease is shifting towards chronic diseases. The average annual growth rate in hospital beds from 2000 to 2014 ranged from -6.0% in Ireland to 6.8% in Korea and 2.8% in Turkey. Length of stay in hospitals fell, from 9.4 days in 2000 to 7.8 days in 2014. However, patients admitted to hospital in Japan or Korea can expect to stay for more than 15 days, while those in Denmark, Turkey and Mexico stay on average fewer than 5 days (OECD, 2015a).

Concerted action should be taken to continue shifting care from inpatient to non-acute care settings and keeping patient out of hospitals, especially when hospitalisation could be prevented or care could be delivered more cost-effectively in a primary care setting.

Figure 1.2 **Health care is progressively shifting out of hospitals but progress in some countries is still slow**



Note: The OECD average includes 35 countries.

1. Data refer to average length of stay for curative (acute) care (resulting in an underestimation).

Source: *OECD Health Statistics* (2016), http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/health-data-en.

Building a richer data infrastructure on activities, quality and outcomes in primary care

Although primary care is being asked to do more, most health care systems lack sufficient data infrastructure to know whether or not primary care is delivering high-quality care. Quality standards, indicators and monitoring frameworks are much less developed in primary care than hospital care. This may be because hospital-based care is more procedural, and so is more amenable to standardisation and measurement.

The strengths of primary care (comprehensiveness, co-ordination and continuity) are harder to define and measure.

Compared to the hospital sector, a significant deficit of information exists on the patterns of care and outcomes in primary care.

The development of comprehensive and actionable indicators would allow PCPs, patients and authorities to benchmark quality and performance against peers or against national guidelines. Doing so would also facilitate analysis of quality trends and provide the information needed to improve quality. This is especially important as increased pressure is placed on the primary care sector to engage in more preventive work and deliver a wide range of care for patients with complex needs. Some OECD health care systems have made good progress in developing a richer information infrastructure to underpin quality monitoring and improvement in primary care. England, for example, has unique, comprehensive and routinely available data for every practice on quality of care. Its Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) is one of the most advanced monitoring systems across OECD countries. QOF is an incentive scheme that provides additional reward to general practitioners (GPs) for how well they care for patients based on performance against more than 80 clinical and other indicators. The programme is designed to incentivise and standardise the provision of evidence-based, high-quality care in general practice covering several major LTCs including mental health problems such as depression. It also includes indicators relating to public health and other services provided in primary care (contraception, screening and immunisation). Beyond the QOF, the country collects several patient experience measures with general practice. About 2.4 million patients registered with a GP practice are surveyed twice a year around access, making appointments, quality of care, satisfaction with opening hours and experience with out-of-hours National Health Service (NHS) services. England has other rich data sources on the quality of mental health care, prevention measures, or around the use of hospital care by GPs, all of which are published at the GP practice level (OECD, 2016a). Denmark and Israel also took steps to better measure quality and outcomes in primary care, although recent events in Denmark illustrate that unexpected obstacles can derail progress in this area (see Case Study 1).

Richer monitoring of primary care quality should be scaled up to measure whether or not the primary care system is delivering effective, safe and patient-centred care. Candidate indicators to measure the quality of primary care should concentrate around prevention, management of chronic diseases, elder care, mental health care and co-ordination between levels of care.

Case study 1

Building rich information infrastructure to underpin quality monitoring and improvement in primary care in Israel and Denmark

Israel

- Israel's *Quality Indicators in Community Healthcare* (QICH) programme captures more than 35 measures of quality of care on preventive measures, use of recommended care, and the effectiveness of care, including for asthma, cancer and diabetes management as well as cardiovascular health.
- Data are available for almost the entire population. The four insurer/provider bodies in Israel draw on QICH data to benchmark their own performance and identify potential shortfalls.
- Insurer/providers developed i) innovative programmes including patient education and empowerment initiatives, and ii) targeted programmes to deliver greater access to high-quality care to specific patient groups (OECD, 2012a).

…

Denmark

- Denmark's *Danish General Practice Database* (DAMD) system was suspended in 2014 because of concerns (most notably among GPs themselves) around the legal basis and intended use of the data. Before that, however:
  - The DAMD system automatically captured primary care diagnoses, procedures, prescribed drugs and laboratory results. From April 2011, every practice was obliged to participate.
  - GPs were able to access quality reports for the management of chronic diseases, as well as other clinical areas of primary care practice, including diabetes management and cardiovascular health.
  - The system enabled easy identification of individual patients who were treated suboptimally and allowed GPs to benchmark their practice against others.
- Studies examining DAMD's impact found significant improvements in the proportion of diabetics on antidiabetic, antihypertensive and lipid-lowering medications (OECD, 2013a).

Source: OECD (2012a, 2013a).

2 Patient-centred care requires more effective primary and secondary prevention in primary care

The burden of chronic diseases is increasing in OECD countries, a major cause of concern not only for population health but also for the economy as a whole. Combined with the trend to shift care outside the hospital setting, this calls for greater prevention efforts to be embedded in primary care practice. Efforts would include evidence-based primary care interventions such as targeted education programmes, counselling in primary care, cost-effective screening programmes and effective management of chronic diseases.

Tackling unhealthy lifestyles and improving early diagnosis to prevent premature mortality

Although key risk factors have declined in many OECD countries, unhealthy diets, obesity and alcohol consumption have spread in others (OECD, 2015a). Over the past decade, alcohol consumption rose in Australia, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

On average across countries covered by the series of *OECD Reviews of Health Care Quality*, obesity rates increased by 24% between 2000 and 2014.

At the same time, the burden of adult obesity is substantial in Australia, the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic, with more than one in five people obese (Figure 1.3). Increasing overweight or obesity rates among children between 2001 and 2014 also gives cause for concern in the Czech Republic (+93%), Portugal (+58%) and Italy (+32%).

Together, alcohol consumption and obesity are risk factors for numerous health problems, including hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, respiratory problems and some forms of cancer. Unhealthy lifestyles and lack of physical exercise, which contribute to premature mortality, to some extent signal a failure of preventive efforts.

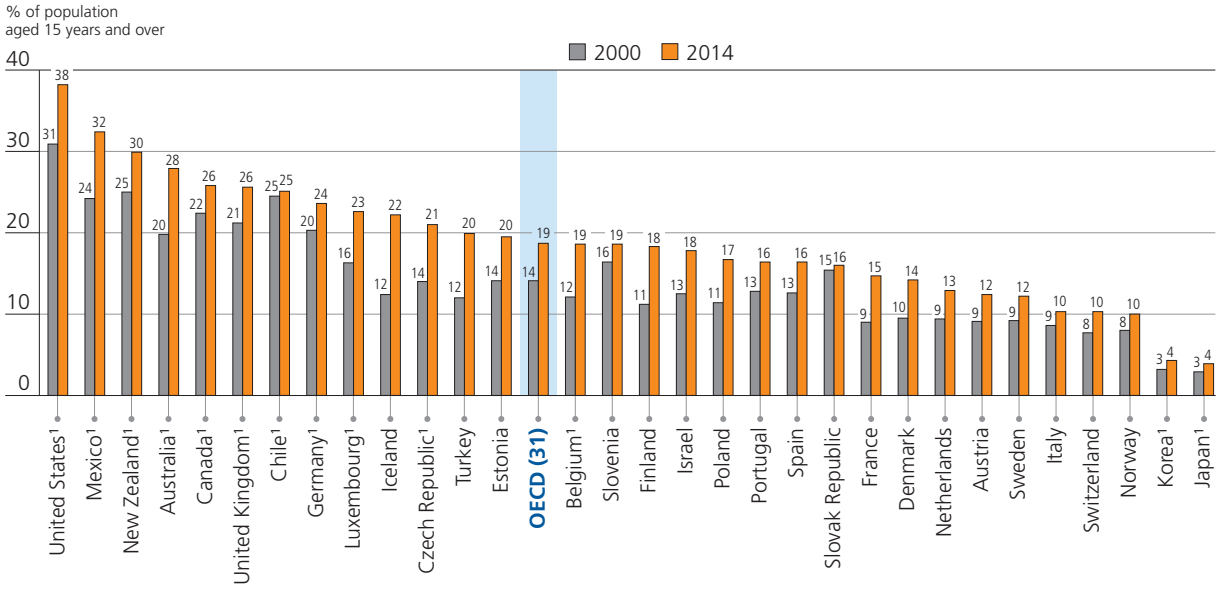
With these considerations in mind, it is important for health care systems to help people modify risky behaviours. OECD health care systems should tackle unhealthy diets by combining several interventions including mass media campaigns, food taxes with targeted subsidies on healthy food, nutrition labelling and marketing restrictions (Sassi, 2010). In a similar vein, health care systems should consider raising alcohol prices and regulating the promotion of alcoholic drinks to address harmful alcohol consumption.

Targeted educational programmes and counselling in primary care are also cost-effective measure to tackle heavy drinking. Together, a package of fiscal and regulatory measures and primary care interventions would reduce the entire burden of disease associated with harmful alcohol use by an estimated 10% (OECD, 2015b).

Delivering evidence-based screening programmes may also reduce premature mortality. Health professionals and the public need to actively engage in interventions proven to reduce mortality (including cancer screening, for example). This was an important recommendation in Turkey, Japan, the Czech Republic and Australia, where less than 58% of women participated in a mammography screening programme in 2013 (OECD, 2015a).

In concert, primary care providers need to raise public awareness to detect and prevent risk factors through cost-effective screening programmes, health education and counselling actions. Such targeted programmes or counselling in primary care, combined with regulatory and fiscal measures, should be trialled in all OECD health care systems to address health risk factors and reduce premature mortality.

Figure 1.3 **Increasing obesity rates in selected OECD countries**



1. Data are based on measurements rather than self-reported height and weight.
Source: *OECD Health Statistics* (2016), http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/health-data-en.

Minimising the impact of chronic disease through effective secondary prevention

For conditions such as diabetes or cardiovascular disease, the cornerstone of effective management includes tailored patient education, lifestyle management, regular monitoring and control of diseases, support for self-management, and identification of complications (OECD, 2015c). Primary care has the potential to play a more pro-active role in secondary prevention and in the management of chronic disease, mental illness and multimorbidities. Clear responsibilities for providing well-coordinated care and ensuring effective secondary prevention need to be assigned to primary care providers. OECD health care systems should learn from Israel, where primary care has successfully taken on prevention and management of chronic conditions. In the Clalit Health Fund, 80% of diabetic patients are cared for by PCPs (OECD, 2012a). This is remarkably high compared to the Czech Republic, where only a third of diabetes care was performed by PCPs (OECD, 2014b). Portugal, Italy and Sweden should also foster leadership of PCPs in prevention programmes (OECD, 2013b, 2014c, 2015d). These countries lack measures to support PCPs to take on responsibilities for managing chronic conditions.

Several countries have incentivised PCPs, or the broader primary care team, to take on responsibilities for managing chronic conditions. England's QOF is one of the largest programmes worldwide to embed evidence-based measures for secondary prevention in chronic disease management in primary care. The programme gives GPs a financial incentive to provide evidence-based care for a wide range of LTCs, including diabetes. The QOF employs process measures (monitoring, prescribing and counselling), intermediate clinical outcomes (glycated hemoglobin, cholesterol and blood pressure), and patient-reported indicators (patient experience with care) to evaluate performance. Evidence shows that such financial incentives have been effective in improving the quality of diabetes care in the country (Latham and Marshall, 2015). The approach taken in Australia is also instructive. The *Practice Incentives Programme* (PIP) for diabetes aims to encourage PCPs to provide earlier diagnosis and effective management of people with established diabetes mellitus (see Case Study 2).

Clear responsibilities for providing well-coordinated care and ensuring effective secondary prevention need to be assigned to primary care providers.

Case study 2

Paying for high-quality care for diabetes in primary care

Australia's *Practice Incentives Programme* (PIP) links general practice financial incentives to 11 indicators, including quality indicators for diabetes care. The *PIP Diabetes Incentive* has three components – a sign-on payment, an outcomes payment and a service incentive payment:

- The sign-on payment is a one-off payment to practices that use a patient register and a recall and reminder system for their patients with diabetes mellitus.
- The outcomes payment is a payment to practices where at least 2% of the practice's patients are diagnosed with diabetes mellitus and GPs have completed a diabetes cycle of care for at least 50% of them. The diabetes cycle of care is to: assess diabetes control by measuring HbA1c; carry out a comprehensive eye examination; measure weight and height; measure blood pressure; examine feet; measure total cholesterol, triglycerides and HDL cholesterol; provide self-care education; and check smoking status, among other activities.
- The service incentive payment is paid to PCPs for each cycle of care completed for patients with established diabetes mellitus.

Although evidence around the impact of the PIP Diabetes Incentive remains limited, some studies suggest positive effects on the quality of care delivered, through improved diabetes management (Scott et al., 2009) or greater compliance with nationally-established minimum requirements for diabetes care (Saunders et al., 2008).

Source: OECD (2015e).

The enhanced role of primary care in secondary prevention is vital to minimise the deterioration of chronic disease. To maximise its benefit, such a strategy should be accompanied by steps to achieve greater care co-ordination and integration across providers (see Lesson 4), to ensure that PCPs have access to appropriate continuing professional development (see Lesson 8), and to support patients in managing their health conditions (see Lesson 7). Together, these measures will support PCPs to provide high-quality care for patients with chronic diseases, leading to reductions in inappropriate referral to specialist care and avoidable hospitalisation.

3 High-quality mental health care systems require strong health information systems and mental health training in primary care

Although OECD health care systems are among the most comprehensive and innovative in the world, with sophisticated quality assurance and improvement initiatives, mental health care systems have been left behind. Even in the OECD's most dynamic systems, where innovative policies around quality of care abound, the mental health sector is usually left out. To change this, health care systems need: i) more data on almost all aspects of mental health care; ii) stronger primary care to deliver high-quality care for mild-to-moderate mental disorders; and iii) greater care co-ordination of mental and physical health care services.

Collecting and reporting more data on mental health care quality

Despite the high burden of mental ill-health (affecting around 5% of the OECD population), high-quality services for mental illness are still thin on the ground. Care for common conditions and survival after a heart attack, stroke or with cancer has improved dramatically across OECD countries, yet people with severe mental disorders have a life expectancy some 20 years lower than the average population. Though outcomes for individuals with mental ill-health are known to be poor (people with a mild-to-moderate mental disorder are more likely to take sick leave, to be unemployed, and to suffer from a chronic disease like diabetes), big gaps in available information on mental health mean that it is difficult to fully understand the quality of mental health care and to push for improvements.

Transparency and accountability for the quality of mental health care is a challenge that many OECD countries are struggling with. In most, it remains hard to identify and follow people who need mental health care, and to understand the relationship between care received and outcomes. As a foundation for improvement, more and better data on mental health care are urgently needed to help policy makers and service providers tackle shortcomings in quality. All countries could develop and publish more mental health data, including at more granular local and municipal levels, and in traditionally hard-to-cover areas such as primary care.

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In a few countries steps are being taken to collect and publish mental health data, for example in Norway, Scotland and Sweden (see Case Study 3). In Norway in particular, availability of indicators for mental health is generally good. The country made impressive progress in establishing and publishing relevant data on quality of care with the nationwide programme led by the Norwegian Directorate of Health (OECD, 2014d). Clear leadership from central authorities to provide a national, consistent approach towards measuring quality in mental health was a key enabling factor.

A national information system for mental health was recently introduced in Italy under the New Italian Health Information Infrastructure (*Nuovo Sistema Informativo Sanitario*, NSIS) (OECD, 2014c). In England, patient-level mental health data are collected in primary, community and secondary care settings, including process and outcomes measures for the service user. These include, for example, data on hospital admissions for mental illness, patient experiences with community mental health services, access to psychological therapies and recovery rates, and waiting times. By contrast, a national strategic approach to measuring quality in mental health care is still lacking in Japan and Korea (OECD, 2012b, 2015f). Some localised efforts to improve collection of indicators of mental health care quality have been started, but are not rolled out nationally. Japan should look to establishing national collection of some key indicators that are still presently lacking. Candidate indicators would be around excess mortality for patients with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, prescribing practices, use of seclusion and restraint, or unplanned re-admissions (OECD, 2015f).

Health care systems should without delay invest in better data collection to track and report on quality and outcomes of mental health care. A better information infrastructure is essential for building stronger mental health care systems.

Case study 3

Norway, Sweden and Scotland: Ways of using data

- In the difficult area of mental health care data, Norway has already made good progress in establishing and publishing relevant data on quality of mental health care. Indicators like inpatient suicide, excess mortality and waiting times for mental health services give a good impression of access to services, patient safety in services, and co-ordination of mental and physical health care. Most indicators that Norway collects, though useful, are primarily process indicators or measures of service capacity, for instance registration of diagnoses or staffing numbers.
- In Sweden, the National Board of Health and Welfare developed a multidimensional quality framework, *Good Care,* to monitor mental health care performance. The framework covers several dimensions of care, including effectiveness, safety, patient-centredness, timeliness, equity and efficiency, with more than 30 process and outcome indicators used to compare quality across regions or patient groups.
- In Scotland, performance measurement in the mental health care system focuses on comprehensive person-centred outcomes, and recovery. The main measurement instrument, the *Adult Mental Health Benchmarking Toolkit,* presents performance indicators in a scorecard format, combining structural, process and outcome indicators.

Source: OECD (2014e).

Developing primary and community sectors to deliver high-quality mental health care

Although concerted efforts have been taken to improve mental health care for severe mental illnesses, there is a current shortage of appropriate treatments for mild-to-moderate disorders across OECD countries. Mild-to-moderate disorders (such as depression and anxiety) are typically understood not to require highly specialised treatments delivered by psychiatrists or in inpatient settings in the vast majority of cases. Rather, they require strong primary and community care.

To ensure high-quality care for mild-to-moderate mental disorders, appropriate evidence-based treatments such as psychological therapies (including cognitive behavioural therapy) should be available in primary care. Even though primary care is overwhelmingly the first point of call for individuals experiencing mental distress, PCPs do not always have the right skills and treatment options to effectively respond to need. In 2012, three countries (Korea, Poland and Switzerland) reported that mental health was not a component of PCPs' training (OECD, 2014e). Ten countries (Canada, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the United Kingdom) reported that PCPs had to take mental health training as part of their continuing professional development. In England, *Improving Access to Psychological Therapy* initiative aims at increasing the provision of evidence-based treatments for mild-to-moderate mental disorders by PCPs. Australia and Denmark recently invested significantly in mental health training courses for PCPs. But in Norway, although GPs are expected to treat and manage mild-to-moderate disorders themselves, it is not clear to what extent GPs take up the mental health training opportunities on offer to them, or how good their mental health skills are (OECD, 2014d). This is also an identifiable gap in Japan. The current lack of PCPs in Japan may in particular drive up underdiagnosis of mild-to-moderate disorders, thus contributing to underprovision of care. Crucially, with the development a new specialism for GPs (see Lesson 1), Japan has the opportunity to place mental health at the heart of education and training of this new profession (OECD, 2015f).

To deliver effective care for moderate disorders, primary care should be backed up by good training, by support from specialist mental health care practitioners, and by good referral options should a patient need to access a more specialised level of care.

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Improving co-ordination of mental and physical health care services

Effective co-ordination of care across health care settings, good follow-up in the community following hospitalisations, appropriate long-term support, and sensitivity to patient requests and treatment needs are important parts of securing high-quality care. Individuals with a psychiatric illness have a higher mortality rate than the general population (Figure 1.4), much of which can be explained by a higher rate of chronic disease (such as obesity or diabetes) and related risk factors (such as smoking, drug and alcohol use or lack of exercise). Research from Scotland, for example, found that depression, chronic pain and heart disease are the LTCs that most often co-exist with other conditions. In particular, mental health and physical health complaints were reported to co-exist in one out of six individuals aged 65–84 (Barnett et al., 2012).

Good co-ordination of mental and physical health care services is key to tackling at least part of this excess mortality, as is more systematic attention to the physical health of psychiatric patients, for instance through regular health checks, and support to individuals trying to give up risky health behaviours.

A multifaceted disease-related approach is needed to reduce this excess mortality, including primary care prevention of physical ill health among people with mental disorders, better integration of physical and mental health care, behavioural interventions, and efforts to change professional attitudes. The use of individual care plans (ICPs) could help support patients, and their care providers, to secure the care package that they need over time. Across several OECD countries (notably in Norway and Japan), ICPs are not fully exploited as a tool to promote good co-ordination and good quality of care between mental and physical health (OECD, 2014d, 2015f).

Concerted actions should be taken across OECD countries to promote the use of such plans to secure greater care co-ordination between mental and physical health. Scope exists to raise professional awareness around the need to attend to the physical health needs of individuals with mental ill-health. This is strongly recommended for mental health professionals and other professionals who may be unused to interacting with patients with mental ill-health.

A multifaceted disease-related approach is needed to reduce this excess mortality, including primary care prevention of physical ill health among people with mental disorders, better integration of physical and mental health care, behavioural interventions, and efforts to change professional attitudes.

Figure 1.4 **Individuals with mental disorders have a higher mortality rate than the general population**

Note: Excess mortality is compared to the mortality rate for the general population.
Source: *OECD Health Statistics* (2016), http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/health-data-en.

4 New models of shared care are required to promote co-ordination across health and social care systems

Integrated care addresses fragmentation in patient services and enables better co-ordinated and more continuous care. Based on published research, integrated care is found important for improving the quality and experience of care for patients with complex needs (Martínez-González et al., 2014a; Nolte and Pitchforth, 2014). While developing new models of shared care based on multidisciplinary practice is a key component to achieve greater integrated care, this might not be enough to build sustainable changes in the longer term.

Addressing fragmentation in patient services through multidisciplinary care teams

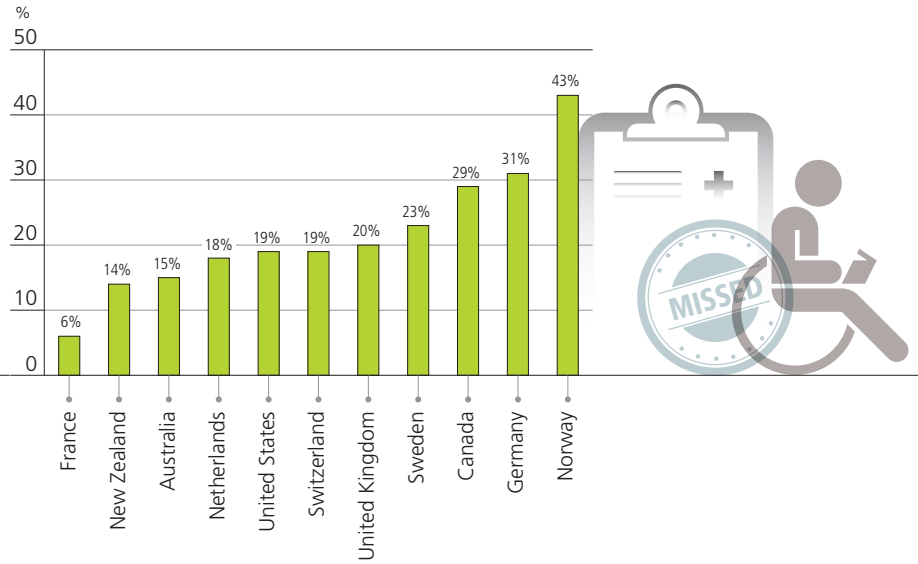
Care continuity and care co-ordination are important for people with higher health care needs, such as those with chronic conditions and older people, who often need both medical and social care over time. Without consistently good co-ordination between primary care, hospitals and long-term care settings, there is a real risk that complex health needs will go unmet.

Poorly co-ordinated and fragmented care is often caused by services operating independently of each other, and can lead to poor patient outcomes, inefficient services and wasted resources. This is a source of great concern across OECD countries. Most health care systems experience co-ordination difficulties at the interfaces between various parts of the health care system and between health care, social care and long-term care. Most often, health care systems report poor care co-ordination between PCPs and specialists, with a weak transfer of patient records and related information across providers. Recent international data show, for example, that more than 20% of older adults in the United Kingdom, 23% in Sweden, and 43% in Norway reported that a specialist lacked their medical history or that their regular doctor was not informed about care received from a specialist (Figure 1.5). As a result, both quality and efficiency suffer.

Most health care systems experience co-ordination difficulties at the interfaces between various parts of the health care system and between health care, social care and long-term care.

Transformation towards more integrated and co-ordinated care requires the courage to challenge the ways in which patients have traditionally been treated. It effectively requires developing new models of care such as multidisciplinary health centres, which offer the potential to encourage health and social care to work more closely together. Such centres gather a number of GPs, usually working in group practice, jointly with other health care professionals (including hospital specialists), alongside professionals from other sectors, notably social workers. These centres offer a range of services, incorporating prevention and health promotion activities, and bridging for primary, acute and social care. Clinical pathways, disease management and case management are key instruments to promote communication and collaboration between providers.

Figure 1.5 **Specialist lacked medical history or regular doctor was not informed about specialist care in several OECD countries**



Note: Percentage of older adults reporting that their specialist lacked their medical history or that their regular doctor was not informed about specialist care.

Source: 2014 Commonwealth Fund International Health Policy Survey of Older Adults in 11 Countries.

A large body of evidence shows that delivering health services seamlessly by multidisciplinary teams is more efficient: the likelihood of service duplication and of hospital use is reduced, while users' experience and quality of life are improved (WHO, 2008; Purdy, 2010).

Building sustainable integrated care using key instruments

All OECD countries have taken positive steps to move towards a more multidisciplinary approach to enable better co-ordinated and integrated care, and are experimenting with new models of shared care. OECD health care systems have taken different approaches to deliver integrated care, though, and some models appear to be failing to achieve sustainable change over the long term.

Norway and Portugal undertook considerable efforts to strengthen co-ordinated care, using multidisciplinary care teams to integrate primary and secondary care (see Case Study 4) (OECD, 2014d, 2015d, 2015g). Reconfigurations in the models of care in Norway made some steps towards system-wide transformation, although greater efforts are needed to continue developing new models of shared care. In Portugal, the gain was more modest, with a lower degree of integration in some *Unidade Local de Saude* (ULS) (groups of NHS health care providers that integrate hospitals and primary care centres in a defined geographical area).

A set of key instruments is effectively necessary to achieve sustainable, integrated and patient-centred care at system level (Table 1.2). The first key element to build vertical integration is to rely on a strong information system to ensure information sharing between providers and across levels of care. Interoperability of information systems is essential to connect health care professionals and services to co-ordinate patient care (see Lesson 10). Norway's information system was not established to support information sharing between primary care, municipalities and hospitals. In particular, information on the quality of primary care at local level was nearly totally absent at the outset of the Co-ordination Reform.

Another key element is to establish financial incentives or adequate payment mechanisms to secure greater patient-centred integrated care. In light of this, payment systems should reward multidisciplinary care and chronic disease management, which as mentioned previously are core components of integrated care. In Norway, appropriate incentives were implemented until 2015 as a means of encouraging health services

to embrace integration and to promote high-quality and patient-centred care. In Portugal, pay-for-performance (P4P) (while accounting for a very small proportion of the ULS budget) is not directed towards integration of disease management.

The experience from Norway and Portugal suggests that comprehensive and sustainable change towards integrated care is more likely to be triggered at local level by the community, when there is strong commitment and involvement from all stakeholders. Strong commitment and involvement from all stakeholders are required to create the necessary environment for cultural change to achieve consensus on how to deliver patient-centred and co-ordinated care. Effective integration between primary and secondary care also requires genuine collaboration among providers, and efforts to break down cultural barriers and providers' wariness about working in new ways (OECD, 2015g). Lastly, as patients often enter the health care system via primary care, it is critical to make sure that PCPs support care co-ordination and bridge acute, primary care and social care.

Overall, developing new models of shared care based on multidisciplinary practice is fundamental to delivering co-ordinated and integrated care. Health care systems should have the opportunity to better use financial incentives, linked to strong information systems, to achieve greater patient-centred integrated care over the longer term. A culture of change and of mutual trust between health professionals will be essential to inspire such changes in health service delivery.

Case study 4

Integrated care models in Norway and Portugal

***Distriktsmedisinsk senter* in Norway**

A distriktsmedisinsk senter (also called *Sykestue*) is an intermediate care facility, a place that is halfway between the hospital and the community, where people are admitted for a few days and cared for by community primary care practitioners (PCPs) working closely with hospital specialists. Some facilities only provide specialist care, while others provide a shared model of care between primary and secondary settings. Development of the shared model of care took place in the 1980s (in the Fosen peninsula), and then became the blueprint for the country's Co-ordination Reform in 2012. The reform encouraged experimentation with and diffusion of such facilities to provide high-quality health care more conveniently, particularly for elderly, frail or otherwise vulnerable populations that find it difficult to travel long distances.

***Unidade Local de Saude* in Portugal**

Unidade Local de Saude (ULS) in Portugal was set up nationally in 1999 to experiment with vertical integration. ULSs are groups of NHS health care providers that integrate hospitals and primary care centres in a defined geographical area. Such groups integrate the planning, delivery, and financing of both hospital and primary care services into a single organisation. They are responsible for providing a complete range of services to a defined geographical population. It is hoped that ULSs will demonstrate entrepreneurship and innovation in how care is delivered, especially for patients with LTCs, making use of greater financial and operational freedom. They improve multidisciplinary co-operation and are seen as central to delivering effective and co-ordinated care for patients with multiple needs.

Table 1.2 **Key features to build vertical integration**

	Strong information system	Adequate payment mechanisms	Bottom-up approach	PCPs supported to co-ordinate patient care	Collaboration and trust among providers
Norway	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Portugal	No	No	No	Yes	No

Source: OECD (2014d, 2015d, 2015g).

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Health care systems need to engage patients as active players in improving health care, while modernising the role of health professionals

Transparency requires transforming the role of patients, placing them at the centre, so that they become partners in decisions about their own care. This should encompass affording respect to patients, involving them in prioritising and planning for health care systems, and promoting their voice and choice through greater health literacy. Collecting patient experience measures is pivotal to delivering health services that are truly responsive to patients' needs. In a complementary manner, health professionals' role must be modernised to deliver greater patient-centred care. Securing a high-quality and high-performing medical workforce should entail more robust forms of quality assurance and monitoring around health professionals' practice as well as using the health workforce more efficiently, for example by extending nurses' scope of practice.

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

5 A strong patient voice is a priority to keep health care systems focussed on quality when financial pressures are acute

In the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, improving efficiency and productivity took on a renewed urgency in all OECD health care systems. In times of acute financial pressure, quality care risks being overlooked. Health care systems, therefore, should ensure that cost control and quality improvements are closely entwined. A strong patient voice is vital in these circumstances to ensure that the quality imperative is not lost and to pursue health service reforms that optimise both cost and quality.

Balancing the twin objectives of quality and efficiency

Clinicians and health care system managers, at central and local level, need to balance multiple system objectives simultaneously. Often, these will be in synergy. In particular, quality and cost control should not be thought of as being in opposition. Efforts need to be made to ensure that cost containment and budgets cuts do not undermine care quality, and that "quality" is a core part of a strategy to realise efficiency gains. Nevertheless, in times of acute financial stress, health care system managers may feel pressure to focus more on ensuring access and achieving financial balance than on quality indicators.

In Italy, for example, concerns were raised that quality was being overlooked in the context of its growing ageing population and rising burden of chronic conditions. Quality improvement effectively took a backseat as the 2008 economic crisis hit, while financial consolidation became an overriding priority. The country first reacted to the crisis with short-term responses (such as limited investment in community and long-term care and preventive services) to fulfil the primary goal of balancing costs and resources (OECD, 2014a). A new national strategy was then recently set up to combine expenditure control with high-value care for patients. This strategy is expected to optimise quality and efficiency in the longer term.

England saw a very small NHS budget increase following the 2008 financial crisis, while facing significant pressures on the demand side. As a result, the objective of achieving financial balance became a focal point of managers' attention, despite the high profile accorded to quality-improvement initiatives over recent years (OECD, 2016a).

Efforts need to be made to ensure that cost containment and budgets cuts do not undermine care quality, and that "quality" is a core part of a strategy to realise efficiency gains.

By contrast, Portugal took efforts to ensure that fiscal constraints did not undermine care quality (OECD, 2015a). Cost control and quality improvements are seen as closely entwined, and the efforts made ensure either that efficiency gains do not undermine care quality, or that "quality" is a core part of assessing whether care delivers good value for money (see Case Study 5).

Case study 5

The focus on quality lies closely alongside the priority of cost control in Portugal

The Portuguese health care system responded well to financial pressures over recent years, successfully balancing the twin priorities of financial consolidation and continuous quality improvement. The tough fiscal reforms did not diminish the country's commitment to continuously improve quality and maintain a universal public system.

Portugal used a diverse set of tools and approaches to realise these gains. The country implemented a comprehensive set of structural reforms to work towards fiscal sustainability, improved efficiency and better quality in the health care system. The pharmaceutical sector in particular saw significant changes following shifts towards the generic drug market and strengthening of procurement processes. In primary care, ambitious reforms to develop internationally innovative new service and payment models began in 2007. Significant efforts were committed to rationalising the hospital sector through specialisation and concentration of hospitals' services. The introduction in 2007 of the *Rede Nacional de Cuidados Continuados Integrados* was another innovative approach to better integrate health and social services for the elderly in need of long-term care services.

Such structural reforms were almost always backed up with sophisticated monitoring capabilities and a careful balance between incentives and sanctions to improve quality of care.

At service level, an equally extensive set of quality initiatives were introduced over recent years, ranging from standardisation of clinical practice, to better use of technology such as electronic medical prescription and shared medical information, to establishment of a national accreditation model. Stronger tools for monitoring the quality and outcomes of care were developed, including a quality benchmarking project that publishes facility-level quality and efficiency indicators on a monthly basis.

Source: OECD (2015a).

Ensuring a strong patient voice so as not to lose the quality imperative

Protecting and promoting patients' rights is an important step to strengthen the position of the patient in the health care system. It is of great importance in times of financial pressure, when high-quality care risks being overlooked.

Several OECD countries' legislation places patients' rights and patient safety at the centre of overall efforts to improve quality of care (Table 2.1). Australia, Denmark, Israel, Norway, Portugal, Scotland and Sweden, for example, have specific legislation to protect patients' rights, afford patients respect and dignity, while clarifying patient responsibilities. Such legislation generally gives patients a right to provide feedback or to raise concerns or complaints about the care they receive. Scotland provides an interesting example: patients' rights and principles for the delivery of health care are specifically defined in the Patients' Rights Act 2011.

Australia, Denmark, Israel, Norway, Portugal, Scotland and Sweden, for example, have specific legislation to protect patients' rights, afford patients respect and dignity, while clarifying patient responsibilities.

Table 2.1 **Key strategies empowering patient**

	Formal definition of patient rights	Patient involvement at services level, or the decision-making level	Measuring patient experience
Australia	Yes – Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights	Patients groups actively involved in the policy-making process, and in the hospital governance	Yes – Mandatory in the acute sector (as part of the accreditation) but not nationally standardised
Czech Republic	Yes – Czech Health Services Act	Limited involvement in policy making	Yes – Mandatory and standardised survey for hospitals, psychiatric clinics and rehabilitation facilities
Denmark	Yes – National Agency for Patients' Rights and Complaints	Limited involvement in policy making and patients not systematically represented on hospitals boards, home for the elderly and nursing homes	Yes – National surveys in several areas
Israel	Yes – Patients' Rights Law	There is no patient associations	Yes – National surveys in several areas
Italy	Yes – Patient rights are not specified by a single law but are present in several pieces of legislation (notably the Italian Constitution, and Law 502/1992, art. 14)	Limited involvement	Yes – Health Conditions and Use of Medical Service Survey but it is more about access than perceived experience with care
Japan	Not available	Limited involvement	Yes – National patient experience survey (only conducted every three years in hospitals: both inpatient and outpatient care)
Korea	Yes – Framework Act on Medical Services	Not available	Yes – Mandatory in the acute sector (as part of the accreditation) but not nationally standardised
Norway	Yes – Patient's Rights Act legislation	Patients groups actively involved in the policy-making process at national and service level	Yes – Several national surveys for inpatient and outpatient health care services
Portugal	Yes – Law 15/2014 (merge between patient charter and several piece of legislation)	Limited involvement	Yes – Several national surveys for primary care and hospital care
Sweden	Yes – Health and Medical Services Act, the patient safety act and the patient safety ordinance	The Patient's Advisory Committee support patient's involvement mistly as service level	Yes – National surveys in several areas
Turkey	Yes – Legislation recognise patient's right (1998 statute of patient rights)	Not available	Yes – Various departments and institutes report to be involved in the collection of information on patient experiences via surveys
United Kingdom	Yes – In England: the NHS constitution ; in Scotland: The Patients' Rights	Yes – Several mechanisms in place to foster patient's involvement. In England, since 2015/16 every GP practice is required to have a patient participation group to strengthen their voice. In Scotland, there is the Our Voice Framework; In Northern Ireland: The Health and Social Care (Reform) Act (2009, sections 19 and 20) sets the statutory duty of public and personal involvement.	Yes – Several national surveys in England, Scotland.

Source: OECD Secretariat based on the series of *OECD Reviews of Health Care Quality*.

The legislation charges the NHS with the duty to encourage, monitor, take action and share learning from the feedback it receives. Scotland's *Our Voice* framework also supports the involvement of patients and the public at every level in improving health care services. This framework introduces innovative new mechanisms for hearing the voices of patients, families and carers at local and national level, including through a citizens' panel. Norway, too, has a Patients' Rights Act empowering patients to complain to the County Governor if they are not satisfied with their health care. Such legislation on patients' rights places patient-centredness as a core component of health care policies. By contrast, separate laws on patients' rights do not exist in Turkey, Korea, Italy and the Czech Republic but the related principles are nevertheless said to be embedded in practice.

6 Measuring what matters to people delivers the outcomes that patients expect

Fundamental to patient-centred care is patient empowerment. Patients' empowerment puts the patient at the heart of health care services so they participate in decision making and take control of their health care needs. While the role of patients has been strengthened in many OECD health care systems, their involvement is still rather limited. Ensuring participation of patients or the public in decision-making processes and capturing patients' experiences with care are key policies to encourage patient empowerment.

Ensuring patient participation in decision making

Patient organisations can be central bodies in the oversight of health care and can push national authorities to improve quality of care. A positive trend across the OECD is the growing role of patient organisations at both service and national levels. At service level, patient organisations in Norway (for example, for mental health) provide support, networks, and in some cases services to local communities, which is highly beneficial for patients (OECD, 2014b). In England, since 2015/16 every GP practice is required to have a patient participation group. Such groups strengthen the patient voice and work with the practice to improve the services provided, as well as the quality of patient experience at the practice (OECD, 2016a). In Australia, the Consumers Health Forum and the Australian Consumers' Association are actively involved in the policy-making process and provide regular public commentary on government policy. Some jurisdictions in Australia have health consumer advisory committees to ensure patient involvement in hospital governance. This is a good initiative that should be extended to other health and social services, including primary care, long-term care and mental health services (OECD, 2015b). By contrast, patient involvement is relatively limited in the Czech Republic, Denmark, Israel, Italy, Japan and Portugal. In Denmark for example, patients are not systematically represented on the boards of hospitals or nursing homes (OECD, 2013a).

To build patient-centred health care systems, concerted actions should be taken to support patient groups or the public in taking part in health care decision making. This is essential to guarantee that the population has the best health conditions and has access to high-quality health care services.

Capturing patients' perspectives and perceptions

Capturing the perspective of patients provides a more complete understanding of their experience as they travel through the health care system. Information reported directly by patients offers insights that cannot be identified through other means. It empowers patients to play a greater role in decisions about their health care (Fujisawa and Klazinga, 2016). There is great promise in translating these metrics into actions that can improve patients' experience and their clinical outcomes. Patients are not the only beneficiaries. Gathering information about the things that matter to patients, such as quality of life, provides a useful basis for health professionals to improve clinical practice. Governments can use the information to deliver health services that are better shaped around patients' needs. Together, this equates to health services that are truly patient-centred.

Information on patient reported experiences and outcomes is necessary to ensure that health services are shaped around patients' needs, preferences and values.

Patient-Reported Experience Measures (PREMs) are increasingly collected by OECD health care systems. PREMs seek patients' perspectives about their experience of care. Such surveys can ask patients how long they waited for surgery, and whether they felt their doctor spent enough time with them and gave them information that was easy to understand. Countries are at varying points in terms of collecting PREMs. In England, PREMs are collected in systematic and standardised national surveys, covering the whole health care sector (hospital inpatients, emergency services, outpatients, maternity care, community mental health, general practice and integrated care). They also include some condition-specific areas identified as public health priorities, such as diabetes and stroke (Fujisawa and Klazinga, 2016). In addition, the *Friends and Family Test* is an innovation that asks patients if they would recommend the services they have used. The test is used in all primary and secondary health care services, and provides feedback in near real-time.

Surveys in Scotland cover hospital inpatients, primary care, social care, maternity care and cancer care. Notably, Scotland is a rare example of a country that has measures of patient experience in out-of-hours primary care. PREMs are also increasingly being used for quality improvement. The Czech Republic, which collects PREMs in inpatient care through standardised surveys from patients discharged from hospitals, psychiatric clinics and rehabilitation facilities, awards "Satisfied Patient" certificates to health care facilities demonstrating outstanding performance on patient experience. In Portugal, patient experience indicators are among those used to contract primary health care. While most OECD health care systems have at least few surveys to collect PREMs, it is often not done in a standardised way (as seen in Korea and Australia) and it is often collected infrequently (in Japan, for example, PREMs are collected once every three years).

The use of Patient-Reported Outcome Measures (PROMs) is less developed in OECD health care systems. PROMs are used to assess patients' perceptions of their outcomes, such as mobility, pain, anxiety and quality of life. PROMs can be used to inform decisions about the allocation of resources, by making assessments about the effectiveness of interventions. In a system where PROM data are publicly reported, they can be used to help patients make better-informed choices. Ideally, PROM data should be fed back to clinicians to help them improve the care and outcomes of patients.

In some cases, OECD countries use PROMs to drive improvements in the quality of patient care (see Case Study 6).

Rarer still is collection of information about safety incidents reported directly by patients. These are known as Patient-Reported Incident Measures (PRIMs). The use of such instruments can help to identify adverse events that are not captured in hospital incident reporting systems, in medical records or by clinical staff. In England, the annual NHS staff survey asks hospital staff questions about near misses and the safety culture of the organisation. The 2011 inpatient survey included questions such as whether doctors and nurses washed or cleaned their hands between touching patients (Fujisawa and Klazinga, 2016). Such questions were also included in the Scottish 2014 inpatient survey.

Overall, OECD health care systems should continue investing in PREMs, PROMs and PRIMs. Collecting such information is pivotal to delivering health services that are truly responsive to patients. If countries are to be well-equipped to meet the challenges presented by ageing populations and the accompanying rise in chronic diseases, it is essential that the data collected correspond to what matters most to patients.

Case study 6

PROMs can be used to make assessments about the effectiveness of interventions

The National Health Service in **England** introduced a system-wide PROM programme in 2009, and it is mandatory for all hospitals to participate. The programme, which is part of the NHS Outcomes Framework, encompasses four surgical procedures: hip and knee replacement, groin hernia surgery and varicose vein surgery. The programme combines condition-specific instruments with generic instruments. The former captures more precise information about particular conditions, while the latter enables patients' outcomes to be compared across a range of conditions. Patients complete surveys before and 3–6 months after a surgical procedure to assess whether the intervention improved their health. Hospital-level data are publicly reported, with applied case-mix adjustment to ensure meaningful comparisons can be made between hospitals.

In **Sweden**, PROMs are collected through national quality registers, and their routine use is encouraged. Among the clinical areas using PROMs are cardiac, breast cancer and rheumatism care, as well as care for hip fracture and spinal surgery.

In **Denmark**, the government has an agreement with the five regions to promote the use of PROMs in the areas of chemotherapy, epilepsy and prostate cancer. The purpose is to assess whether patients need check-ups, tests and other treatment to promote high-value care.

Israel recently commenced a pilot PROM programme, with a view to starting a national programme in which all hospitals will be expected to participate. The pilot involves two large hospitals, and the collection of PROM data for prostate cancer, cataract surgery and coronary artery disease. It is anticipated that the PROM programme will include hip and knee surgery as well. A national PROM programme for mental health already exists.

Sources: OECD (2012a, 2013a, 2013b, 2016a); Fujisawa and Klazinga (2016).

7 Health literacy helps drive high-value care

Health literacy refers to individuals' capacity and skills to access and understand information that helps them attain and maintain good health, and patients' ability to act upon health information. It is a key determinant of high-quality outcomes of care and of health care costs. An increasing body of research suggests that good health literacy is associated with more participation in health-promoting and disease-detection activities, healthier behaviour, and reduced hospitalisation, morbidity and mortality (WHO, 2013). For all these good reasons, health literacy should be considered as a public health objective per se. Yet this is seldom the case in OECD countries. While no one model exists for improving health literacy, encouraging informed-patient choice, promoting patient education, and investing in decision aids for patients are key elements.

Although data accessibility is improving across OECD countries (see Lesson 9), the data are not always standardised to allow benchmarking across providers or to enable users to make informed decisions about their care. OECD health care systems should better ensure that patients can use quality-related information to assess the quality of providers. Among those at the forefront of attempts to help patients make informed choices are Australia, Denmark, Korea, Portugal and the United Kingdom. Australia, Denmark, Korea, Portugal and the United Kingdom use tools to ensure that information regarding health care providers' performance is transparent. The strength of these tools is to report performance data in a systematic and standardised way to allow benchmarking across providers.

Encouraging informed-patient choice

It is universally acknowledged that promoting patient choice increases opportunities for them to select providers that best meet their health care needs. It enhances patients' control over the health care services they use, which can also be a lever for quality improvement by increasing providers' accountability. But promoting informed-patient choice is only possible when quality-related information is made publicly available. Without information, users cannot participate in their health.

Among those at the forefront of attempts to help patients make informed choices are Australia, Denmark, Korea, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

For example, England supports patient choice in the area of primary care, hospital care, maternity, mental health services, etc. MyNHS is a public-facing website that draws upon these data to provide information on the performance of services (hospitals, GP practices, care homes, mental health providers and dentists) and consultant outcomes in 15 specialties, and public health, adult social care and health and well-being. Standardised information that allows benchmarking and is tailored to public use is also provided by NHS Choices, Care Quality Commission and Public Health England (OECD, 2016a). By contrast, the information around providers' performance in the Czech Republic, Italy, Israel, Japan and Turkey is either not publicly disclosed or is not standardised to allow for benchmarking.

All OECD health care systems should invest in tools to enable patients to make appropriate health decisions and increase their ability to navigate complex health care systems.

Promoting patient education and self-management

Patient education and self-management is an essential component of health literacy. It enables patients to be active participants in decision making affecting their health care, improving both quality and outcomes of care. Self-management and patient education prevents health complications and reduces adverse events. Evidence demonstrates that improving patients' self-management reduces physician visits, emergency department visits and avoidable admissions for certain chronic diseases, as well as improving their health outcome (FitzGerald and Gibson, 2006; Holman and Lorig, 2004; Purdy, 2010).

Self-management and patient education prevents health complications and reduces adverse events.

A number of policies can encourage better self-management by patients. First, providers need to be able to explain complex health diagnoses and treatment approaches to patients in a user-friendly, easily understood manner. Training health professionals on effective communication of complex information is therefore important. Such training includes methods to assist patients to problem solve and interpret their symptoms, and to increase health professionals' awareness of the impact of patient self-management on health outcomes (Yank et al., 2013). Patient education programmes and counselling sessions are another fruitful way to support better patient self-management. Such interventions help patients develop a better understanding of how their conditions affect their lives and how to cope with their symptoms. This gives patients the tools, skills and support they need to improve their own well-being and quality of life (Purdy, 2010; Yank et al., 2013). A number of countries introduced education programmes specifically designed to support better patient self-management. One successful example is Israel, where patient education is provided through patient training courses and counselling sessions organised by health funds. Such programmes intend to improve lifestyle habits and self-management skills for those with complex needs (OECD, 2012a). Likewise, Australia adopted a national approach to health literacy in 2014 (*The National Statement on Health Literacy: Taking Action to Improve Safety and Quality*). Specifically, the National Statement focussed among other areas on education for patients and health care providers (OECD, 2015b). Scotland developed a *Health Literacy Action Plan* to make sure that health and social care services are catered to each citizen and promote self-management (OECD, 2016a). By contrast, a lack of strategy to promote patient self-management was noted in the Czech Republic and Korea (OECD, 2012b, 2014c).

Across OECD health care systems, greater efforts are called for to make sure that primary and secondary health services provide patient support as they take on a more active role in managing their own health conditions.

Investing in decision aids for patients

Transforming the role of patients so they become partners in making decisions about their care requires decision aids that help them consider the potential benefits and risks of treatment options. Access to quality-related information and instruction provided by doctors may not be enough to promote appropriateness of care. Patients sometimes ask for treatments, procedures and tests that are not necessarily in their best interest. A recent nationwide survey of physicians conducted in the United States showed that almost half of them receive requests from patients for an unnecessary test or procedure at least once a week. Three in ten said this happens at least several times a week (*Choosing Wisely*®, 2014).

The *Choosing Wisely*® campaign is an interesting initiative attracting attention worldwide as a potentially useful tool for empowering patients by assisting them in making the right decisions about their care. The campaign was launched in the United States, but has since expanded to more than ten countries. Its overarching aim is to promote discussions between clinicians and patients to help patients choose care that is supported by evidence, that does not duplicate other tests or procedures patients have already received, and that is free from harm and truly necessary (see Case Study 7). It is hoped to be effective by educating both patients and their doctors, and by facilitating a discussion between them that assists in decision making. So far, only Australia, Italy and the United Kingdom have invested in such tools, while Japan has started to publish a list of *Choosing Wisely*® recommendations.

OECD health care systems should demonstrate greater commitment to such decision aids geared towards patients. Not only do they help deliver better patient-centred care, they can also help ensure that the benefits of clinical guidelines or standards of care are not lost at the point of care.

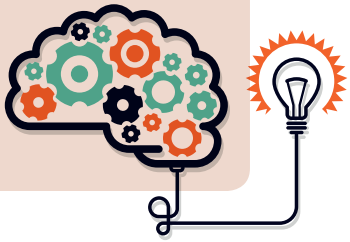
Patients need tools that help them better understand evidence-based recommendations and that support them in demanding high-quality and good-value care.

Case study 7

The *Choosing Wisely*® campaign helps patients make the right decisions given their health conditions

The *Choosing Wisely*® campaign is led by clinicians who identify services for which there is strong evidence of significant overuse with potential harm or cost. The campaign hinges on changing doctors' behaviours and practices and the public's knowledge and attitudes. It empowers both physicians and patients and emphasises the centrality of the doctor-patient relationship in helping patients make the right decisions given their health conditions.

The campaign is based on a bottom-up approach with broad physician engagement, with a list of "do not do's" across multiple medical specialties. There are lists written for doctors, with accompanying lists for patients in more consumer-friendly language. The lists identify inappropriate care across a range of medical specialties, with the aim of reducing its use. The premise of the campaign is to pull evidence-based medicine out of scientific journals and into the public domain. The overarching objective is to reduce unnecessary care and harm, while at the same time reducing costs to the health care system.



Sources: www.choosingwisely.org/.

8 Continuous professional development and evolving practice maximise the contribution of health professionals

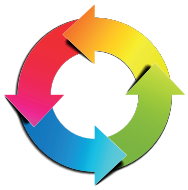
While robust approaches to health professional education and licensing for physicians are the norm across OECD countries, more could be done to make sure that health professionals have the knowledge and skills they need in today's rapidly evolving health care systems. Encouraging continuous medical education (CME) and continuous professional development (CPD) and changing scope of practice (for nurses, for example) are two ways to maximise the contribution of health professionals in delivering high-quality care.

Ensuring a high-performing medical workforce throughout their medical careers

Health care systems are changing rapidly, with accepted best practice evolving and new technologies and techniques continuously introduced. In some health care systems, it is accepted that awarding a license to practice at the end of medical education is not sufficient to ensure high-quality care across a career of 50 years or more. In light of this, OECD health professionals, and health care system leaders, are seeking effective ways to support the health workforce to deliver high-quality care throughout their medical careers.

CME and CPD are effective ways to support the health workforce to deliver high-quality care throughout their medical careers. However in several health care systems, CME and CPD approaches are informal or unmonitored. This is a potential weakness in the Czech Republic, Denmark, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and Turkey (Figure 2.1).

In Turkey, although CME and CPD are voluntary, the medical workforce (e.g. family physicians) is provided with orientation training and face-to-face training through a distance education system. By contrast, a more formalised approach is taken in Australia and the United Kingdom, with minimum requirements backed up by monitoring and appropriate sanctions for enforcement (OECD, 2015b, 2016a). Linking CME and CPD requirements to re-licensing medical professionals is a strength that makes Australia and the United Kingdom leaders across the OECD. Such approaches should be trialled in other OECD countries to support the health workforce to deliver high-quality care throughout their medical careers.



Linking CME and CPD requirements to re-licensing medical professionals is a strength that makes Australia and the United Kingdom leaders across the OECD.

Nonetheless, a delicate balance must be struck between robust quality assurance and maintaining trust in medical professionals and ensuring adequate space for clinical judgement. In Denmark and Sweden for example, external involvement in regulating health professionals' knowledge and skills is deliberately light-touch (OECD, 2013a, 2013b). Sweden has no formal, national systems of CME and CPD, and consistent with Sweden's culture of local empowerment, trust and shared values, this agenda is not nationally mandated. The responsibility for CME and CPD

for all employed medical staff in Sweden rests with employers (e.g. county councils, municipalities and private providers). In Denmark, professionals engage in regular CPD and learning, but expectations and requirements around this are not formalised in any way. In Norway, only GPs have the choice to re-license every five years, although the system is not mandatory. Higher fees are offered to GPs who undertake re-licensing.

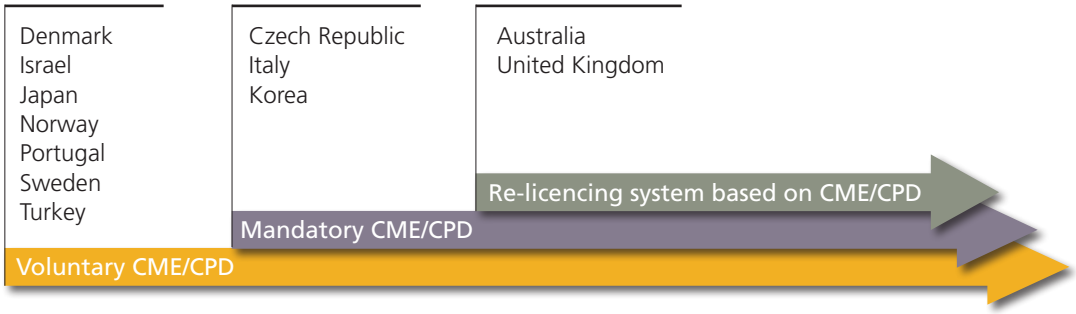
Maintaining the quality and efficacy of CME and CPD activities is another important consideration. Current approaches to developing health professionals' skills and knowledge need to be strengthened in such a way as to be best matched to changing population needs. To some extent this can be included in CME and CPD activities, for instance by tailoring available training to areas of professional weakness. Italy did this in 2013 by requiring CME and CPD providers to offer certain high-priority training such as maternal health, sexual health and preventive health (OECD, 2014a).

While each OECD health care system will continue to develop its own approach to CPD and CME, it is vital that all centre educational objectives or professional development on preventive care, chronic disease management or rehabilitative care.

Allocating health professionals' roles more efficiently

Beyond robust CME and CPD systems, task shifting and the development of new roles for health professionals are gaining momentum in OECD countries. An increasing body of evidence supports the effectiveness of sharing or transferring roles traditionally performed by doctors to nurses. Nurses are found to provide as high-quality care as PCPs in the provision of first contact care and the routine management of chronic diseases for stable patients; and nurse-led care is associated with higher patient satisfaction, lowered overall mortality and lowered hospital admissions (Laurant et al., 2005; Martínez-González et al., 2014).

Figure 2.1 **Ensuring and improving the quality of health professionals**



Source: OECD Secretariat based on the series of *OECD Reviews of Health Care Quality.*

Developing a primary care nurse role to be involved in prevention, in patient education and in chronic disease management is identified as a priority for health policy in several OECD countries. With appropriate training, nurses can, for example, co-ordinate the early discharge of patients with LTCs, take responsibility for the co-ordination of patient care, or be a first point of contact for patients and their families. An increasing number of OECD health care systems are going in this direction to provide better-quality care and to reduce health care cost. In Japan for example, long-term care managers have a role in co-ordinating care (see Case Study 8) (OECD, 2015c). Sweden offers another illustrative example as practice nurses and other non-physicians play a significant role in frontline care delivery. Sweden was one of the first European countries to create nurse-led clinics for patients with LTCs, such as diabetes and heart failure (OECD, 2013b). In a similar vein, nurses in Portugal can take on a case manager role for patients with diabetes to be responsible for annual checks, patient education and other aspects of case management (OECD, 2015a).

Health care systems should have the opportunity to use health professionals in a more efficient manner by changing their scope of practice. Developing a primary care nurse role or care co-ordinator role can not only help manage the increasing demands for health care, but it is also an essential step to help reduce dependency on the hospital sector and increase care co-ordination and integration. The introduction of new roles for nurses or other allied health professionals will require an enabling legislative and regulatory framework, and often needs to overcome opposition from medical professionals.

Case study 8

Japan's unique cadre of long-term care managers

Japan created a new profession of long-term care managers to co-ordinate provision of health and social services care needs for elderly individuals. Care managers carry primary responsibility for ensuring the co-ordination of care for elderly individuals with complex needs, and are a first point of contact for such patients and their families.

The profession is now highly systematised, with clear qualification criteria. The role, competencies and responsibilities of care managers are clearly recognised as an important part of the solution to providing better-quality health and social care.

Care managers in Japan come from a mix of professional backgrounds (including nurses, dentists or social workers) and their professional association, which counts around 25 000 members, offers training, seminars and publications.

Source: OECD (2015c).

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Health care systems need to better employ transparency and incentives as key quality improvement tools

Although growth in health spending has been slower since the 2008 global financial crisis, government health spending is expected to continue to rise in the medium to long term. The share of health spending now accounts for around 15% of government spending, and public spending on health and long-term care is on course to reach almost 14% of GDP by 2060. Health care systems need to find effective ways to improve their efficiency. Health authorities need reliable mechanisms to guarantee the accountability and transparency necessary for a more efficient, high-performing health care system. Measuring, monitoring and benchmarking quality over the whole pathway of care are essential ingredients in such a process. Improving accountability and transparency also involves mechanisms such as external quality evaluation, incentivising high-quality care, and sharing and learning from good practices. Not only are data and incentive structures crucial to build a strong accountability framework, they are also key instruments to realise efficiency gains without losing sight of the quality imperative. The importance of monitoring capabilities and incentives as levers for quality improvement should not be underestimated, especially in times of acute financial stress.

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

9 High-performing health care systems have strong information infrastructures that are linked to quality-improvement tools

Good information systems are fundamental to assure that health care is effective, safe and patient-centred, and to make optimal use of available resources. In most health care systems, however, the data generated remain concentrated on inputs and activities, with a dearth of information around outcomes and quality of care. More systematic data collection is needed, notably in the area of primary and community care. This is a fundamental step to then move to more systematic public reporting and to appropriately link payment to outcomes, quality and high-value care.

Investing in health data infrastructure

A well-established information infrastructure is a key enabler for monitoring quality of care with reliable and valid quality measures. It can consist of various data sources such as mortality statistics, specific clinical registries (such as a cancer or diabetes registry), administrative databases, electronic health records (EHRs) and surveys conducted on specific patient groups or households. Depending on the quality and comprehensiveness of the data infrastructure, such data sources can serve as a tool not only to assess volumes of care and inputs within the health care sector, but also to monitor quality in the provision of care (OECD, 2013a).

The increasing availability of a range of national databases with individual-level records across the spectrum of health care administration, from population health surveys to disease registers, is a positive trend across OECD countries.

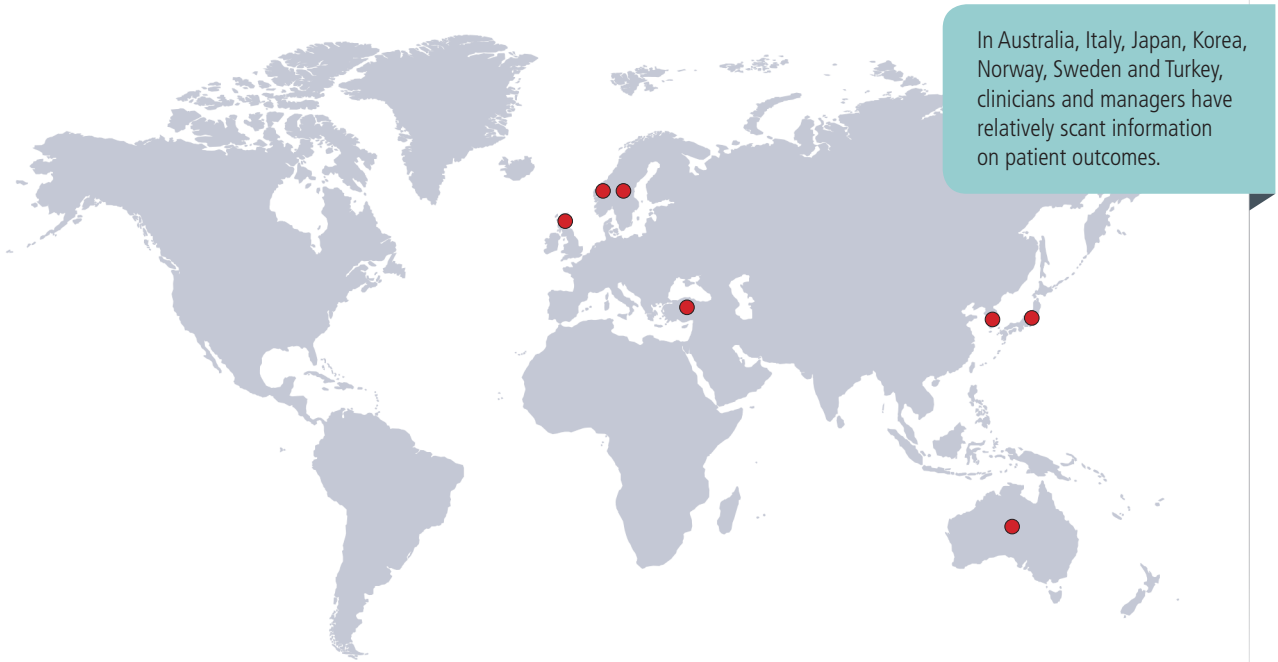
Most countries have national inpatient hospitalisation data, mortality data, population health surveys and disease-specific registries. Only Italy, Japan, Portugal and Turkey do not report national registers for specific patient groups, such as those with cancer or diabetes (Table 3.1). In these countries, disease registers are not regarded as a formal component of the national information infrastructure, hampering progress towards measuring quality of care. By contrast, Denmark and Sweden have made remarkable progress in measuring quality of care through clinical registries (OECD, 2013b, 2013c).

Although health information infrastructure is improving, the data generated by health care systems are too concentrated on inputs and activities. Substantive gaps remain in what is known about the outcomes and quality of care. A general dearth of national data for primary, community and long-term care is noted in particular (Table 3.1). In Australia, Italy, Japan, Korea, Norway, Sweden and Turkey, clinicians and managers have relatively scant information on patient outcomes. However (and as already mentioned in Lesson 1), Denmark and Israel developed comprehensive and actionable indicators to support quality improvement in primary care, although Denmark's initiative derailed recently (see Case Study 2). The approach taken in the United Kingdom and Portugal is also instructive and can guide other OECD countries in such a process. Both systems have unusually rich data at individual provider level and they successfully collect outcomes and quality indicators around prevention, management of chronic diseases, and elder care (OECD, 2015a, 2016a).

Table 3.1 **Key strategies towards monitoring and improving care quality**

	National quality registers	Collecting information on the performance of PC practices and at individual professional level	National reporting and learning system for patient safety
Australia	Yes	No	Yes
Czech Republic	Yes	No	No
Denmark	Yes	Yes	Yes
Israel	Yes	Yes	Yes
Italy	No	No	Yes
Japan	No	No	Yes
Korea	Yes	No	No
Norway	Yes	No	Yes
Portugal	No	Yes	Yes
Sweden	Yes	No	No
Turkey	No	No	No
United Kingdom	Yes	Yes	Yes (for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland)

Source: OECD Secretariat based on the series of *OECD Reviews of Health Care Quality*.



In a similar vein, information is lacking on practice variation and health disparities across OECD countries. While addressing practice variation and inequalities in health is often regarded as a key pillar of a strategy to improve quality of care, important gaps in information limit understanding the extent of the problem, informing policy development and resource allocation, and assessing impacts of strategies over time. Israel, for example, is not capable of stratifying health outcomes and quality of care by key dimensions of inequality. In the Quality Indicators in Community Healthcare (QICH) in particular, disaggregated data by district population group and geography are lacking (OECD, 2012a). Making indicators available by key dimensions of inequality is essential to map and monitor such disparities.

All OECD health care systems should invest in a strong information infrastructure, with robust data collection spanning all levels of care. Strengthening health information infrastructure requires steps to collect more information on outcomes and quality of care (notably in primary care), as well as on practice variations and health inequalities.

Moving to public reporting and rewarding quality and value

Beyond the development of health information infrastructure, considerable thought must be given to how data can be made accessible and useful to users, health professionals and regulators.

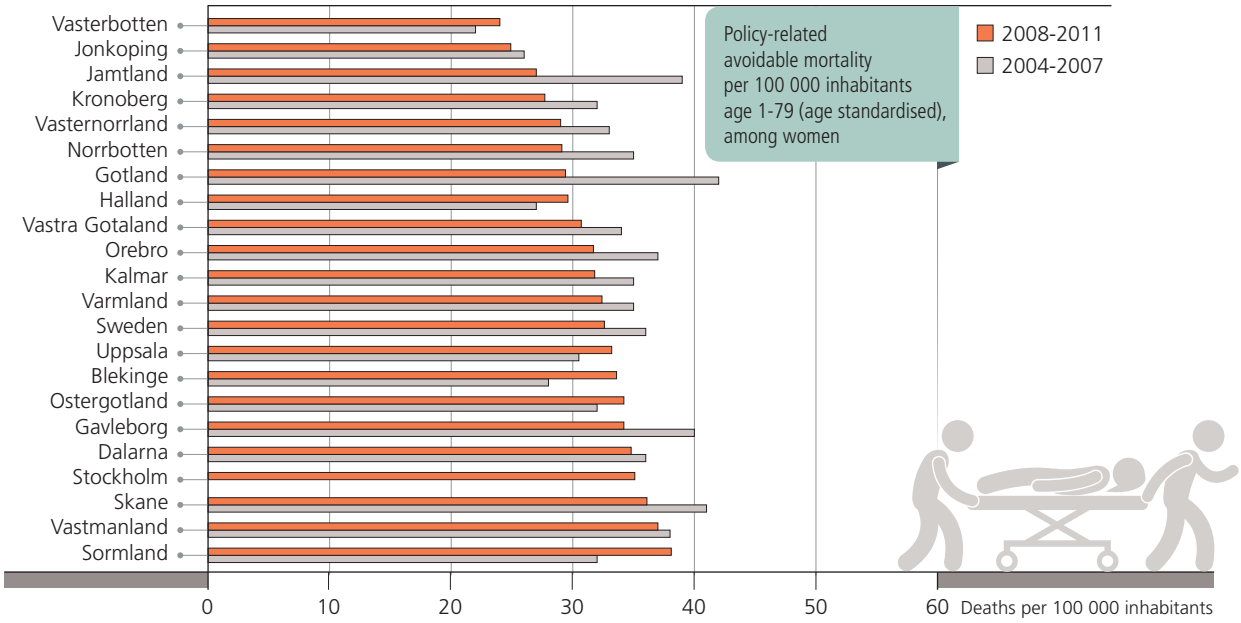
Performance feedback and public reporting provide the necessary accountability mechanisms in the health care governance model to drive quality improvement and health care system performance. The reputational effect of collecting and publishing data on the quality of care is an important driver of improved performance. Collecting and publishing data at individual level to rank providers relative to peers gives poorer performers an impetus to improve. This also provides a platform to share experiences and facilitate learning about good practice for quality improvement. In Israel, performance feedback and peer comparisons were found to provide persuasive incentives for doctors to improve quality of primary care (OECD, 2012a). Turkey's health information infrastructure enables providers to compare their performance at the province and country level, which might steer quality improvement.

The Swedish benchmarking of health outcomes, conducted by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), demonstrated the potential for various stakeholders to improve via rigorous open comparison. The country annually publishes counties' performance across more than 150 indicators of health care quality and efficiency. Sweden showcases a breadth and depth of transparent public reporting that few other OECD countries can currently emulate. Figure 3.1 shows rates of avoidable mortality per 100 000 inhabitants, for two time periods, disaggregated by gender and by region, age-standardised and nationally benchmarked (OECD, 2013c). In the United Kingdom as well, Public Health England publishes a vast number of public health, health and social care indicators for local clinical commissioning groups and local authorities. The NHS is notably profuse in terms of what it publishes at provider level (hospital, GP practice and consultant) (OECD, 2016a).

Publishing data, providing performance feedback and rewarding high-quality care are key instruments to promote accountability, facilitate shared learning and push for quality improvement.

Using health information infrastructure to reward high quality in the provision of care is equally important. While evidence of the effectiveness of P4P is mixed (OECD, 2016b), experiences from OECD countries show that financial incentives are likely to work and drive improvement in quality of care when accompanied by other non-financial incentives. Korea's *Value Incentives Programme* (VIP; see Case Study 9), which applied to the hospital sector, had the virtue of balancing financial incentives with non-financial incentives (OECD, 2012b). This careful balance has been found effective to drive quality improvements in acute care. Another interesting practice comes from Sweden, which used financial incentives to stimulate compliance with clinical guidelines to encourage quality development in high-priority areas such as patient safety, long-term care and mental health. Financial incentives were distributed from the central government to local governments that demonstrated improvement in reducing unnecessary hospitalisations and the use of inappropriate drugs among elderly people in institutional care (OECD, 2013c). Such an approach successfully aligns information and financial incentives to the quality and outcomes of care.

Figure 3.1 **Sweden's *Open Comparison System* is at the forefront of attempts to improving public reporting**



Source: Adapted from SALAR (2012), *Quality and Efficiency in Swedish Health Care,* Regional Comparisons 2012, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, available at http://webbutik.skl.se.

Case study 9

Korea combines financial and non-financial incentives to drive improvements in acute care

The *Value Incentive Programme* (VIP), a pay-for-performance (P4P) scheme, is an innovative policy to use financing to drive improvements in quality of care. Launched in 2007, the programme initially sought to cover Korea's tertiary hospitals in seeking to lift Korea's performance in two areas of comparatively poorer performance among OECD countries: acute myocardial infarction (AMI) and the proportion of caesarean deliveries.

The VIP seeks to rank hospitals according to their performance in delivering good-quality clinical care and patient outcomes. Participation in the VIP is mandatory among Korea's 44 tertiary hospitals. The VIP works by computing "quality scores" for each hospital on its performance in addressing AMI and delivering an appropriate amount of caesarean deliveries.

The results of each of the measures for AMI and caesarean deliveries are published on the Health Insurance Review and Assessment (HIRA) Service website and hospitals are provided with result reports. Each year, hospitals are distributed into one of five grades according to their score. These grades are used to determine whether a hospital receives a financial bonus as a reward for good performance.

Results from the VIP are positive, with improvement in quality of care for AMI and caesarean deliveries. The key levers for driving performance under the VIP have been i) the relatively small size of bonus (to help mitigate against the risk of providers diverting resources to focus on certain things in order to maximise incentive payments), ii) the collection and publication of data on quality and their reputational effect. The Korean balance of modest financial incentives and a focus on data collection is found to be the virtue of the VIP.

Source: OECD (2012b).

More broadly, payment systems should be redesigned to reward quality and value as far as possible, rather than to merely reimburse inputs or activity. Fee-for-service (FFS) schemes are appropriate for discrete interventions with a natural limit on demand, such as vaccinations – but remain prevalent across OECD health care systems (OECD, 2016b). Most primary care in Denmark, for example, is paid for by FFS. This is poorly suited to rewarding the core functions that primary care seeks to deliver, namely comprehensiveness, continuity and co-ordination. One solution is to develop the FFS model by redefining "service" more broadly. In Japan, for example, the FFS schedule contains packages of comprehensive care for people with chronic diseases (OECD, 2015b). This comes close to a capitation system where rates are adjusted for specific patient groups, dependent on need. This is an intelligent approach to paying for bundles of preventive and management care for people with complex needs, but more experimentation, evaluation and sharing of lessons learnt across OECD health care systems are needed in this area.

Pro-active efforts are needed to move to more public reporting and to increase incentives linked to the value and quality of care. A careful balance between financial and non-financial incentives has potential to drive continuous improvement in health care quality and efficiency.

10 Linking patient data is a pre-requisite for improving quality across pathways of care

Understanding the performance and quality of health care systems requires the ability to monitor the same individuals over time, through the whole pathway of care. However in most health care systems, data are in silos, separated and disconnected. Too few countries are able to observe patient pathways and outcomes as patients experience health care events, receive treatments and face improvements or deteriorations in their health status.

Linking patient records across databases

To improve the quality and efficiency of health care, health care systems need to follow individual patients across the care continuum. Following patients through different health and health care events often requires the linkage of patient records across databases. Record linkage involves linking two or more databases using a unique patient identifier. In 2012, 14 countries had national data containing identifying information that could be used for record linkage for hospital inpatient data for example (OECD, 2013c). Only Australia, Germany, Poland and the United States did not report a unique identifying number within their national hospitalisation databases. At the same time, the use of a personal identifier for data linkage is reportedly complicated due to privacy legislation in Australia, the Czech Republic, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea and Norway. The United Kingdom, Sweden, Portugal and Denmark strengthened their legislative framework to permit privacy-protective data use.

The United Kingdom, Sweden, Portugal and Denmark strengthened their legislative framework to permit privacy-protective data use.

Case study 10

Sweden follows patients' cycle of care to improve quality and effectiveness of care

Sweden uses a range of data sources to undertake both quality and efficiency assessments of clinical care guidelines. Use of national registers for the health care needs, activities and outcomes of particular patient groups is widespread, with a focus on using such information to audit and improve the quality of care. Research on the national hip fracture register, for example, led to the finding that some orthopaedic prostheses have a much longer life expectancy than others, which led to new practices in orthopaedic procedures.

Data linkage enables evaluating the extent to which guidelines are followed and whether or not the health outcomes of the patient meet expectations. Sweden is able to link elderly patients' health care needs, activities and outcomes across its dementia register, senior alert register (containing information on falls, pressure sores and malnutrition) and its palliative care register. This evidence is then used to revise the guidelines, completing an ongoing cycle of improvement in care quality and efficiency.

Source: OECD (2013a, 2013c).

In the United Kingdom several legislative frameworks were introduced so that information can be collected, held securely and made available with safeguards in place to protect individuals' data. Sweden provides an interesting example of how linking personal health data led to improvement in quality and effectiveness of care (see Case Study 10) (OECD, 2013a). In Turkey, patient records are maintained over a single identification number, and patients can access their own data in a dedicated and safe electronic system where they can choose with which physicians and institutions to share their data.

Using electronic health records to better support data linkage

An EHR is a computerised patient-centred medical record that contains a wide range of information including a patient's characteristics, medical history, treatments and laboratory results. Ideally, EHRs are built to be shared between providers and across health care settings to support the provision of the most appropriate care. The overarching objective of such systems is to improve the quality and safety of care, avoiding medical errors as well as facilitating optimal care pathways and promoting efficiency in the use of health care system resources (OECD, 2013a).

In most health care systems, the use of EHRs is at least reported in PCP offices or hospitals. In 2012, EHRs were widely used among both PCP offices and hospitals in Israel, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom (Table 3.2). However, a general lack of interoperability of EHRs persists across health and social care settings in the Czech Republic, Israel, Italy, Korea, Norway, Sweden and Turkey. There, EHRs are rather provider- or organisation-centric, and are not portable across health care settings or between providers. The lack of interoperability is a major weakness hampering the possibility of conducting research to improve quality across pathways of care.

Investing in a national EHR system enabling information sharing between health care facilities and providers is essential to support provision of the most appropriate care and to push for quality improvements. Health care systems should strive to develop standard data requirements that are applied consistently to all providers nationwide. This is fundamental to adequately support co-ordinated and integrated care (see Lesson 4).

Table 3.2 **Use of electronic health records in OECD countries**

	Proportion of primary care physician offices with electronic data capture (%)	Proportion of hospitals with electronic data capture (%)
Austria	>80	100
Belgium	70	75
Canada	41.3*	na
Denmark	51	100
Estonia	98	100
Finland	100	100
France	na	na
Germany	>80	>90
Iceland	100	100
Indonesia	≈20	na
Israel	100	100
Japan	15.2**	14.20
Korea	63.50	52-66***
Mexico	≈15	≈30
Netherlands	100	100
Poland	≈15	≈5
Portugal	90	70
Singapore	14	80
Slovak Republic	na	na
Slovenia	90	90
Spain	≈90	≈70
Sweden	100	100
Switzerland	20	90
United Kingdom	≈100	100
United States	57	19

* Percentage of physicians (not physician offices).

** Percentage of physician offices (both GPs and specialists).

*** 66% of tertiary/general hospitals and 53% of hospitals use electronic medical records (EMRs).

Source: OECD (2013a)

11 External evaluation of health care organisation needs to be fed into continuous quality-improvement cycles

Mechanisms for external evaluation of health care facilities are institutionalised across OECD countries to promote accountability and trust between various stakeholders (the public, health care managers, purchasers and regulators). It is hoped that such mechanisms will not only assure the quality of health care organisation but will also improve quality and safety of care. Maximising the impact of external evaluation requires a balanced approach between quality assurance and quality-improvement mechanisms, where external evaluation is fed into a continuous quality-improvement process at service level. A more comprehensive approach is also called for in a majority of OECD health care systems to ensure that the focus of external evaluation (such as accreditation) goes beyond the acute care sector to include primary and community care.

Encouraging continuous and formative processes of external evaluation

External evaluations are control mechanisms to assure and improve the quality of health care facilities (Klazinga, 2000). Such mechanisms range from statutory inspection, ISO certification and peer review to accreditation. They all use explicit standards, derived from the best available evidence, to assess performance of health care organisations through surveys, assessments or audits. External evaluations are particularly needed when the information infrastructure is underdeveloped and when performance data are lacking.

Overall, external evaluation mechanisms have been progressively embedded in the quality governance architecture to meet the changing demands of public accountability, clinical effectiveness and improvement of quality and safety (Shaw, 2004). This is a positive trend observed across most OECD health care systems, reflecting a greater emphasis on both patient safety and clinical performance.

Three types of approach emerge across OECD health care systems (Table 3.3). The first consists of a formative process of external evaluation, involving continuous quality improvement through monitoring, feedback and incentives. Such approaches, which are reported in Australia, Denmark and England, often rely on a mandatory accreditation system combined with strong internal quality improvement at service level. It is the most sophisticated and extensive form of external quality assurance mechanism for health care facilities. It contains incentives to seek continuous quality improvement through standard setting, measurement, feedback and evaluation of change. The list of accredited providers is most often widely known among the public through a transparent information system. The accreditation scheme in Denmark, for example, effectively nurtured a quality-improvement culture. The key to making the accreditation approach effective in Denmark is its comprehensive set of standards and indicators, its mandatory nature and uniform scoring system, and the fact that each health care organisation must request re-accreditation after three years.

Table 3.3 **Three approaches towards external evaluation of health care organisations**

Formative approach	Mixed system	Summative approach
Australia, Denmark, England	Israel, Japan, Portugal, Korea and Turkey	Czech Republic, Norway, Italy, Sweden, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales

Source: OECD Secretariat based on the series of *OECD Reviews of Health Care Quality*.

The approach taken enabled the professionalisation of quality-improvement work, and focussed leadership attention on achieving continuous quality gains.

The second approach relies on a two-fold system based on a compulsory inspection system and a voluntary accreditation system. Such mixed systems are reported in Israel, Japan, Korea, Portugal and Turkey. In such systems, there is still an important reliance on quality-assurance mechanisms, while too few organisations nurture a quality-improvement culture at service level.

The last approach consists of a summative process for external evaluation based on a one-time assessment. This one-off evaluation was reported in the Czech Republic, Italy, Norway, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Sweden and Wales. With this approach, the risk is to be too focused on minimal requirements and to contain too few incentives for providers to seek continuous quality improvement.

While the last type of approach is the first step in quality assurance, it might be too narrowly oriented to encourage continuous quality gains in the longer term. To drive improvement in safety and quality, health care systems should ensure that external evaluation is not just a one-off assessment but rather is linked to a continuous quality-monitoring and improvement process.

Extending accreditation to other sectors beyond acute care

Beyond ensuring a balanced approach between quality assurance and quality-improvement mechanisms, room exists to expand the current scope of accreditation. The majority of OECD health care systems limit the accreditation process to inpatient hospital care. The lack of comprehensive accreditation programmes for primary care is a major weakness in the Czech Republic, Italy, Japan, Korea, Norway and Sweden. Norway, for example, only carries out planned, risk-based audits in primary care.

The lack of comprehensive accreditation programmes for primary care is a major weakness in the Czech Republic, Italy, Japan, Korea, Norway and Sweden.

By contrast, Australia, England and Portugal pursue another path by extending accreditation to the primary and community care sector. In particular, England's approach to health service accreditation is at the forefront of OECD efforts, and is a model for other health care systems to emulate (see Case Study 11). It is unusually comprehensive as it accredits all providers of primary and social care (OECD, 2016a). Australia is taking steps in this direction. The accreditation of the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) standards has been extended to community health services, but is not mandatory for all services. It is recognised that many primary and community care services require additional support to fully implement the NSQHS standards. The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care is working on two projects in relation to this to: i) develop a patient safety and quality-improvement framework for primary care based on the NSQHS standards; and ii) facilitate the development of a governance and reporting framework for general practice accreditation in Australia.

Overall, OECD health care systems need to extend the focus of accreditation to other sectors beyond the acute care sector, including primary, community, long-term and social care. Strengthening and broadening accreditation programmes to all primary and community services is essential if more care is to be delivered outside of the acute care setting (see Lesson 1).

Case study 11

England has a comprehensive accreditation programme for primary care

In England, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), an independent statutory body established in 2009, is responsible for the inspection for hospitals, adult social care, general practice, mental health care services, ambulances and community-based services. All providers of regulated activities, including NHS and independent providers, have to register with CQC and follow a set of fundamental standards of safety and quality below which care should never fall. The CQC assesses if providers are meeting these fundamental standards through monitoring and inspection.

The findings of such assessments are shared with the public, and citizens are encouraged to share their experience or report concerns to the CQC. The role is similar to the tasks of the Joint Commission in the United States, and the standards are in line with those of the Joint Commission.

England's health care system is one of the few in the OECD to have a comprehensive accreditation programme for primary care. By April 2017, almost all GP surgeries in England will have been inspected and rated. Notably, among the inspection measures is how well people with LTCs are cared for by the practice, and whether the care helps to avoid unnecessary hospital admissions. Out-of-hours services are also subject to inspection. Detailed individual practice inspection reports are publicly available on a website.

Source: OECD (2016a).

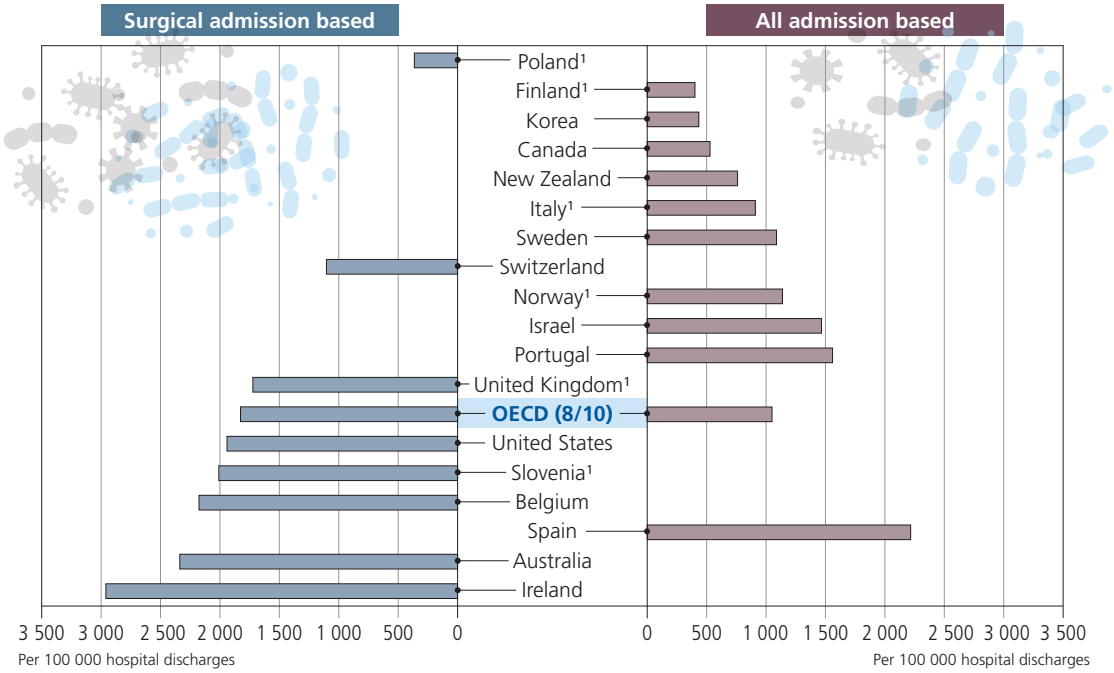
12 Improving patient safety requires greater effort to collect, analyse and learn from adverse events

As evidenced by undesired health outcomes (such as adverse drug reactions, medical device-related adverse events, health care-associated infection or post-operative complications), ensuring safe care for patients is an ongoing challenge for OECD health care systems.

Despite good quality assurance for new technologies (in particular, pharmaceuticals), health care systems most often focus on procedures for market access and very little is done to follow up on the safety and effectiveness of approved technology. At the same time, health care systems need to collect and report indicators to identify failures in standards of care and to learn from them.

In 2013, rates of sepsis after abdominal surgery ranged, for example, from 364 per 100 000 admissions in Poland to more than 2 227 per 100 000 admissions in Australia and 2 960 in Ireland (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2 **Post-operative sepsis in abdominal surgeries are preventable and indicative of poor-value care**



Note: Rates were not adjusted by the average number of secondary diagnoses.

1. The average number of secondary diagnoses is < 1.5.

Source: *OECD Health Statistics* (2016), http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/health-data-en.

Health technology re-assessment is seldom used in OECD countries.

To improve patient safety and minimise harm, OECD health care systems need to conduct more systematic health technology re-assessment and to set up robust national adverse event reporting and learning systems.

Systematically assessing new and existing technologies

Quality assurance of pharmaceuticals appears good across several countries, with effective systems developed for authorising the use of such technologies (although quality assurance for medical devices is often considered less stringent than that for pharmaceuticals). Strong institutions at system level are in place to regulate market entry and use. These institutions are most often in charge of marketing authorisation, pharmaco-vigilance and clinical trials.

However, the use of medical devices and pharmaceuticals in real life sometimes leads to discovery of unpredicted side effects such as safety incidents and adverse events that were not detectable in clinical trials. In this case, a gap exists between the efficacy of the product assessed during clinical trials and its observed effectiveness in real life use. While this gap is widely recognised, the safety and effectiveness of new technologies is only rarely assessed through formal re-evaluation. Health technology re-assessment is seldom used in OECD countries. A third of OECD health care systems rely on periodic re-assessment after technologies are included in the range of benefits covered by public funding (Auraaen et al., 2016). This is the case for instance in Australia, Belgium, Chile, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, Poland and Switzerland. However, only few OECD countries (Australia, Chile, Spain and the Slovak Republic) initiate a re-assessment of a technology following specific events related, for example, to new evidence on clinical safety and cost-effectiveness of existing technologies.

To reduce the incidence of adverse events, and improve patient safety on the ground, concerted action should be taken to assess the safety and effectiveness of approved technologies. Health care systems thereby need to engage a dynamic approach, involving more systematic re-assessment processes for existing technologies.

Developing reporting and learning systems from adverse events

Improving patient safety requires strong mechanisms to monitor adverse events and promote sharing and learning. Appropriate quality indicators need to be collected and reported to identify failures in standards of care and to learn from them. The approaches taken in the Czech Republic, Korea, Scotland, Sweden and Turkey are too patchy, with no national adverse event reporting and learning systems (Table 3.1, third column). By contrast, Italy is an instructive example that could guide other countries in the process of capturing more adverse events and promoting opportunities for learning (see Case Study 12).

Its *National Observatory on Good Practices for Patient Safety* encourages continuous improvement of quality and safety of care by sharing learning from adverse events in hospitals and clinics and promoting transfer of good practices. The *Observatory* has very effectively raised awareness among health care professionals and nurtured a culture of change across the whole country (OECD, 2014a).

To minimise harm, each adverse event should be collected and analysed, with information fed back to providers. This should result in recommendations to prevent adverse events and should be shared with other providers to promote learning. Implementing such a reporting and learning system should be a policy priority across OECD health care systems to detect, measure and learn from adverse events.

Case study 12

Italy's *National Observatory on Good Practices for Patient Safety* promotes sharing and learning from adverse events

While the patient safety policy agenda in Italy is relatively recent, it is internationally regarded as a model to emulate. Set up in 2008, the *National Observatory on Good Practices for Patient Safety* is designed to:

- develop strategies for continuous improvement of quality and safety of care by promoting transfer of safe practices
- develop patient safety improvement interventions
- develop a network of health professionals who share knowledge and experiences to facilitate transfer of experience.

A bottom-up approach is implemented through regional and inter-regional workshops in which all Italian Regions and Autonomous Provinces (R&AP) participate. Learning from these workshops is consolidated, and emerges as national recommendations applicable across the country, made publicly available on the *Observatory's* portal. The next step, regional implementation of these recommendations, is supported by AGENAS, the national authority tasked with supporting R&AP to improve health care quality. Using a questionnaire, AGENAS monitors compliance with the recommendations and seeks to understand the barriers that R&AP encounter in implementation.

Source: OECD (2014a).

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Conclusions

Delivering high-quality care is an essential feature of a high-performing and resilient health care system. High-quality care is care that is safe, effective and patient-centred, and should never be taken for granted. Health care systems face tremendous challenges – complex care needs and care processes, increased health care demands (especially for chronic conditions), and, crucially, an economic landscape in which health care systems will have to achieve more for less. Assuring, monitoring and improving the quality of health care is more than ever a central concern across all OECD health care systems.

To meet these demand- and supply-side challenges while ensuring health care systems' financial sustainability, governments should insist upon transparency to support their health care systems to continuously secure better quality and outcome of care.

Steering on outcomes will allow governance and health service delivery to be adaptable, responsive and centred on providing high-value care.

Remodelling health care systems and changing cultures is not an easy task, but experiences from OECD countries reveal three priority areas for action:

- *Places:* Health care systems need to invest in key primary care functions to offer comprehensiveness, continuity and co-ordination to patients with complex needs. Building a strong primary care foundation requires investment to create co-ordinated and high-quality community care services and to develop a rich information infrastructure to underpin transparent quality monitoring and improvement.
- *People:* Transparency means placing patients at the centre, to deliver high-value care that maximises both quality and efficiency. This should encompass affording respect to patients, involving them in decisions affecting health care, as well as promoting their voice and choice through greater health literacy. Collecting patient experience measures is also pivotal to delivering health services that are truly responsive to patients' needs. Listening and engaging with patients while modernising the role of health professionals will be central to the foregoing priority of strengthening primary care.
- *Data and incentives:* Health care systems need to invest in the right data and incentives to promote accountability and transparency. Collecting and publishing information around outcomes and quality (rather that inputs and activities), moving to performance feedback and linking payment to the provision of high-quality care are key instruments that should not be underestimated, especially in times of acute financial stress.

Accountability frameworks and incentives are, in particular, important levers to support quality improvement. In primary care, health care systems should collect more quality indicators around prevention, management of chronic diseases, elder care and mental health care (as seen in the United Kingdom, Portugal, Israel and Denmark). Performance feedback and rigorous open comparison are also key tools to create a platform to share experiences and facilitate learning to improve. Combined with public reporting, non-financial incentives are successful drivers for quality improvement (as seen in Israel, Korea and Sweden). Financial incentives, such as those linking payment to quality and outcomes of care, are effective when they are directed towards high-priority areas such as greater management of chronic conditions (as seen in Australia and the United Kingdom), quality of hospital care (as seen in Korea) or mental health and long-term care (as seen in Sweden).

Last but not least, more research is needed to achieve a better understanding of health care system achievement and performance. Proper and repeated application of the plan-do-study-act cycle should underpin this, focussed on patient outcomes to steer local and national policy making. While OECD health care systems are getting better at embedding evaluation of local initiatives, system-wide assessment of health care system performance is still lacking. Such evaluation should be more systematically conducted to assess the impact of policies and to fill existing gaps in knowledge. To plan national health strategies and prepare health reforms, concerted action is needed to undertake national health care system performance assessments and to benchmark results internationally.

CARING FOR QUALITY IN HEALTH
LESSONS LEARNT FROM 15 REVIEWS OF HEALTH CARE QUALITY

Over the past four years, the OECD has conducted a series of in-depth reviews of the policies and institutions that underpin the measurement and improvement of health care quality in 15 different health systems. This synthesis report draws on key lessons from the *OECD Health Care Quality Review* series. The objective is to summarise the main challenges and good practices to support improvements in health care quality, and to help ensure that the substantial resources devoted to health are being used effectively in supporting people to live healthier lives. The overarching conclusion emerging across the *Health Care Quality Review* series concerns transparency. Governments should encourage, and where appropriate require, health systems and health care providers to be open about the effectiveness, safety and patient-centredness of care they provide. More measures of patient outcomes are needed (especially those reported by patients themselves), and these should underpin standards, guidelines, incentives and innovations in service delivery. Greater transparency can lead to optimisation of both quality and efficiency – twin objectives which reinforce, rather than subvert, each other. In practical terms, greater transparency and better performance can be supported by changes in where and how care is delivered; changes in the roles of patients and professionals; and employing tools such as data and incentives more effectively. Key actions in these three areas are set out in the 12 lessons presented in this synthesis report.

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