SHORT REPORT

The First National Conference on Quality in Health Care in Egypt

NADWA RAFEH and SAMY GADALLA*

INTRODUCTION

The first National Conference on Quality in Health Care was held in Cairo, Egypt, on 26–28 September 1995. The conference was sponsored by the Egyptian Ministry of Health through the Cost Recovery for Health and Quality Assurance Projects funded by the United States Agency for International Development, and was supported by the Egyptian Society for Quality in Health Care.

CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

The theme of the conference was “Quality in Health Care in Egypt: the Role of the Customer, the Provider, and the Payer”. Since the conference was the first of its kind in Egypt, the goal of the conference was to introduce the concepts of quality and quality improvement in health care as they relate to the Egyptian Health Care system. The conference had five objectives:

1. To explain the concept of quality management in health care.
2. To review the approaches and methodologies for implementing quality management in health care institutions.
3. To exchange Egyptian knowledge and experiences on quality improvement with regional and international countries.
4. To present the experiences of the Cost Recovery in Health and the Quality Assurance Projects in implementing quality assurance programs in their pilot hospitals.
5. To provide a forum for Egyptian researchers and to encourage them to present their work on improving the quality of care in their institutions.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CONFERENCE

A ten-member organizing committee, representing the sponsoring organizations, was formed to oversee the preparation of the conference. A scientific committee was also formed to plan for the technical content of the sessions and to review abstracts. In response to the call for papers, 40 abstracts were received and reviewed; 15 papers were accepted for presentation and 3 for poster sessions.

Prior to the conference, a wide multi-media campaign was launched to sensitize the Egyptian public to the concept of, and the need for, quality in health care, and to explain the objectives of the conference, and its importance to lay people. Several articles and announcements were published in widely distributed newspapers. Interviews with key Ministry of Health officials and other members of the organizing committee were broadcast in major television and radio programs. To coincide with the media campaign, more than 450 copies of the conference program, with a call for papers, were mailed in two consecutive announcements.

*Dr. Rafeh is the Resident Advisor and Dr. Samy Gadalla is the Quality Assurance Coordinator with the University Research Corporation's Quality Assurance Project funded by the United States Agency for International Development Project #DPE-5992-A-0050-00. The Cost Recovery for Health project is funded by the United States Agency for International Development Project #263-0170.
PARTICIPANTS

Conference was attended by 750 participants. As this was the first attempt in Egypt to address the issue of quality in healthcare at national level, the conference was targeted to a wide range of participants representing the private and public sectors, as well as the not-for-profit organizations. Participants represented all sectors of the Ministry of Health, the teaching institutions, the National Health Insurance Organization (HIO), private hospitals, the health sector of the military forces, the Egyptian Medical Syndicate, the medical associations, pharmaceutical companies, health-related consumer organizations, community leaders, and consumer advocates.

CONFERENCE SESSIONS

The conference sessions were divided into five plenary sessions and two sets of concurrent sessions held over the three-day period. The sessions were organized around six technical areas: Basic concepts on quality and the definition of quality assurance in health care. This information was presented in a plenary session. Defining the responsibilities for quality: the role of the consumer, the provider and the payer. Three concurrent sessions were conducted, each session addressing the role of the key players in quality, the consumers, the providers, and the payers. Experts in the three areas were invited as resource persons for these sessions. The experts shared their expertise and experience with a wide audience who participated actively in the discussions. Principles and techniques of continuous quality improvement. Two plenary sessions on this topic were led by an international expert. Research experiences in quality management. Presenters were Egyptian and regional researchers who presented their work in four concurrent sessions. International, regional, and national experiences in quality improvement. This plenary session presented experiences of the United States in assessing the quality of care, and regional and Egyptian experiences in implementing quality assurance. Towards a national quality management program in Egypt. The closing plenary session presented the long-term strategy and specific plans of action for the Egyptian Ministry of Health and the Egyptian Society for Quality in Health Care.

CONCLUSION

The First National Conference on Quality in Egypt can be considered a successful event for many reasons. Some of these reasons are:

1. The conference created an awareness and increased interest in quality in health care in Egypt. Through the pre-conference media campaign and the conference, the concepts of quality in health care were disseminated to a large audience in Egypt. While the original plan was to target an audience of 300 participants, widespread interest led conference organizers to increase invitations to 450. However, the final number of registered participants was 750, greatly surpassing the expectations of the organizers.

2. Conference was able to bring together health care professionals from different health sectors and specialties in Egypt to share the problems they face and to agree that there is an immediate need to address the problems in quality in a more organized way at the institutional level, as well as at national level.

3. For the first time in Egypt, the conference provided the opportunity to focus on the user of health care services. Conference participants listened to the consumer's perspective on health care in Egypt through the presentation in a plenary session of an actual consumer's experience with the Egyptian health care system, and through a separate group discussion session.

4. The conference provided the opportunity to share experiences with countries in the region who have health care problems and resource limitations similar to those of the Egyptian system.

†The National Health Insurance Organization insures 15 million students and employees working in quasi-governmental and private agencies.