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Accreditation of Healthcare Facilities: A Friend or Foe?

Maseeh uz Zaman¹ and Nosheen Fatima²

During the last five decades, voluntary accreditation programs have been adopted by staggering number of healthcare facilities in the United States healthcare system. In the last two decades, this trend has also been opted by the leading healthcare facilities in other parts of the world as well. These accreditation programs vary considerably in their specific objectives, goals and rationale but primarily are woven around patient safety as the cornerstone and ensuring minimal negative outcomes of care such as mortality and morbidity. These programs have attempted to assure the society that an accredited healthcare service conforms to commonly accepted standards pertinent to statutory requirements, payment methods and incentives, innovation in teaching and training, dissemination of knowledge and an ongoing effort for continuous quality improvement. Joint Commission International (JCI) is considered as the leader in global healthcare with fundamental objective to improve patient safety and quality of healthcare by collaborating with healthcare facilities and government ministries in more than 100 countries around the globe.¹

Generally, for accreditation, a healthcare organization submits an application to the accreditation body with pertinent information like history, organogram, mission, vision and complete spectrum of services offered to their patients as a healthcare provider. This is followed by the submission of a detailed internal audit report elucidating degree of applicant's compliance with core standards of practice established by the accrediting body. Then a team of experts and surveyors from accreditation body visits applicant's healthcare facility and performs a detailed physical survey and audit. This includes direct observation of various functions (including tracer methodology), review of clinical and administrative records and written policies, review of teaching, training and human resource documentation and also direct interview with employees, patients and hospital leadership. Surveyors during the survey keep sharing their observations with the applicant and provide them chance to rectify the observations before the completion

of audit. Finally, surveyors compile their findings in a form of scoring which is based on established criteria and declare the accreditation status of the applicant. Usually the level of accreditation varies from accreditation with commendation to standard accreditation/partial accreditation or non-accredited.

The incentives for a healthcare facility to get accredited are better chances of funding, better business opportunities and reputation as a certified healthcare facility geared towards patients' safety and care. In United States, an accredited healthcare facility gets eligibility for medicare and other governmental healthcare programs. Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organization (JCAHO) gives accredited facility a deemed status for meeting health and safety standards for medicare and medicaid. The incentives for healthcare facilities in our region are better chance to get grants and funding for research and education from national or international donor agencies and better business opportunities.

Despite of above mentioned incentives, we do not see too many accredited healthcare facilities and primary reasons are stringent standards and performance criteria which discourages many healthcare facilities to proceed for accreditation. Another important factor is the cost incurred in the process of obtaining accreditation. In general, amount to be paid to the accreditation body makes only 10% of total cost with the remaining 90% related to site preparation, up-gradation of infrastructure and staff training prior to the survey.^{2,3} Another possible factor which refrains healthcare organization from accreditation process is possible negative impact on the rate of service delivery due to too many checks in attempt to maintain the accreditation as decertification by the accrediting body would have a serious and negative impact and would put the reputation of organization at stake. However, available data based on observational and experimental studies do favor a positive impact of accreditation programs upon functioning, efficiency, quality of care and overall outcome of healthcare provider after accreditation.⁴

The accreditation programs for healthcare providing institutes ensure patient safety and quality of care and healthcare organizations adopt these programs voluntarily for better chances of getting funding, better business opportunities and reputation as a certified healthcare facility. However, cost incurred upon accreditation process and stringent criteria of quality and

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standards are the major hurdles in the wider acceptance of these accreditation programs. In this regard, government and accrediting bodies must develop a pragmatic strategy to address financial aspect and educate healthcare professionals to mitigate their skepticism towards accreditation.⁵

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