

Understanding the Role of Thai Community Hospital Directors in Implementing the Universal Health Coverage Policy in Relation to Primary Health Care

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ABSTRACT

In 2001, Thailand adopted the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) policy. This policy focuses on Primary Health Care (PHC), with the aim of reforming the Thai health system to provide health services to all, regardless of a person's ability to pay. The Community Hospital Director (CHD), as the middle manager of the provincial health system and the leader of the district health system of Thailand, is a catalyst for communication up and down the organisational structure, and between executives and front-line services implementing this policy for the rural poor. The role of the CHD is influenced by structural interests, professional sub-cultures, the organisational context and the relationship between the Community Hospital and the communities. For Thai health reform the greatest hope for improving efficiency lies with changes in the provision of primary health services at the community level and this entails understanding the role of the CHD.

This study presents a qualitative study of eight CHDs and 35 stakeholders involved in the implementation of rural health care reform (the UHC policy and PHC) in order to understand the structural and institutional factors affecting the Thai CHDs in implementing the UHC policy in relation to PHC, and the complex real life context for primary health care delivery and implementation in rural Thailand. The research design is mixed methods with in-depth interviewing preceeding and informing a focus group. The data analysis technique used in this study is thematic analysis.

The results show that the sustainability of PHC services provision under the administration of community hospitals to meet the needs of rural poor may be problematic. Many barriers at the policy and operational levels limit the role of the CHD, who is the lynchpin of the Ministry of Public Health at district level. These barriers include structural interests, understanding of PHC as Primary Medical Care (PMC), Thai bureaucratic management style, and the difference in professional sub-cultures. Moreover, there is no structural and operational support for the CHD's management role. These factors concentrate the consequences of the dual role of the CHD as clinician and manager. These consequences also seem to be linked to the CHDs' primary training in biomedical science. In response to the barriers, the CHDs act according to a 'medical

mindset', focusing on their interests, professional autonomy and their hospitals, rather than on the broader health needs of the community.

The goal of the UHC policy in providing equity of access to PHC to all citizens may not be achieved, unless the role of CHDs, as both 'professional manager' and 'community developer', is encouraged through training in health management and PHC and is supported by the government. The concept of comprehensive PHC should be acknowledged and put into practice by all stakeholders, both within and outside the health sector. In addition, the government needs to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in district health services management.

CERTIFICATE

I certify that I am the sole author and that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and it is not currently being submitted for any other degrees.

I certify that to the best of my knowledge that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



Prawit Taytiwat

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	Antenatal Care
BMA	Bangkok Metropolitan Administration
CPHCC	Community Primary Health Care Centre
CD	Chief of District
CDHO	Chief of District Health Office
CH	Community Hospital
CHD	Community Hospital Director
CSMBS	Civil Servants Medical Benefits Scheme
CUP	Contracting Unit for Primary Care
CUS	Contracting Unit for Secondary Care
CUT	Contracting Unit for Tertiary Care
DHAC	District Health Administration Committee
DHCC	District Health Collaborating Committee
DHF	Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever
DHO	District Health Office
DLA	Department of Local Administration
DM	Diabetes Mellitus
DRG	Diagnosis-related Group
FHL	Family Health Leader
FP	Family Practitioner
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GP	General Practitioner
HA	Hospital Accreditation
HC	Health Centre
HCA	Health Care Accreditation
HHC	Head of Health Centre
HHPCU	Head of Hospital Primary Care Unit
HPCU	Hospital Primary Care Unit
HPH	Health Promoting Hospital
HSRI	Health System Research Institute
HT	Hypertension
HVHV	Head of Village Health Volunteer
ICU	Intensive Care Unit
IMR	Infant Mortality Rate
IPD	In-patients Department
MCoT	Medical Council of Thailand
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoHSSD	Ministry of Health Security and Social Development
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
NESDB	National Economic and Social Development Board
NHCO	National Health Commission Office
NHSO	National Health Security Office
NSO	National Statistic Office
OPD	Out-patients Department
PAO	Provincial Administration Organisation

PC	Primary Care
PCMO	Provincial Chief Medical Officer
PCU	Primary Care Unit
PHC	Primary Health Care
PHO	Provincial Health Office
PHCCV	Primary Health Care Centre Operated by Villagers
PMC	Primary Medical Care
SHFA	Sustainable Health for All
SSS	Social Security Scheme
TAO	Tambon Administration Organisation
TNC	Thai Nursing Council
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
UHCS	Universal Health Coverage Scheme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VHC	Village Health Communicator
VHV	Village Health Volunteer
WHO	World Health Organization
WHO SEARO	World Health Organization, South-East Asia Regional Office
WHO Thailand	World Health Organization, Country Office for Thailand