

Management summary

Relevancy research

The Dutch hospital care is facing a few big changes, like the introduction of diagnostic treatment combinations (DBC's) and a free market system. One of the reasons for these changes is the rising costs of total healthcare. In view of that they try to improve the (secondary) hospital processes. Therefore, information is needed and that's where information management fits in. Because of the limited role of information management at this moment, the vision of hospital directors is most interesting to investigate.

Aim and research methods

The aim of this research is to explore the vision of hospital directors at the development of information management in relation to the improvement of the secondary processes. At first a literature study was done to investigate the current views on information management and also to compile definitions of effective and efficient operational management [in Dutch 'bedrijfsvoering'] and information management. Secondly, six Board members of five large periphery hospitals were interviewed, just like a manager Finance & Computerization and a senior advisor of the Dutch association of hospitals (NVZ).

Theoretical framework

It turned out that there are several views on effectiveness, efficiency and operational management and that's why one clear definition for this research is compiled as follows: The (internal) management and control of the secondary processes, in addition to which the intended organizational goals are reached with as less as possible resources. Information management in hospitals is defined as the total of managerial activities connected with the management and control of information, as a support of the realization of the organizational goals. In the literature there is little variety in the perspectives on information management. Nevertheless two perspectives are useful for this research. The first one is a generic information management map (Maes *et al.* 1997). The second is specific hospital-oriented and comes from Winter *et al.* (2001). An important similarity is that an information strategy must be formulated, driven by the information need, and be aligned with the business strategy (Porter 1996). From these perspectives a situation is outlined wherein information management in hospitals can be organized. In that situation an information management department is given place, wherein several (organizational) levels and disciplines are working together on the design and continuation of the information supply, driven by their information need.

Results

The situation as sketched in the theoretical framework was only partly found in the hospital practice. It can be said that hospital directors find the design of information management increasingly important, but so far they do not succeed in working it out. On the one hand this is due to the complexity and a lack of 'best practices', on the other hand to a lack of vision. According to the directors the causes lay outside their sphere of influence, like a lack of budget, unreliable information, unwilling employees and limited cooperation with partners. In future they see several opportunities for improving information management. It is noticeable that investing in new or better systems in their opinion the best solution is, while they fail to calculate the costs and benefits. Other chances for information management are lying in the use of the internet en in the improvement of logistics. However, there is much more organizational support needed for that.

Conclusions

Based on the literature and the empirical study, four conclusions can be drawn which are validated by the NVZ-advisor. First, hospital directors increasingly stand for information management, but their perspectives differ from literatures. Second, hospital directors fail to translate concept of information management in practice, for reasons that lay (in their opinion) outside their sphere of influence. Consequently they seek solutions mostly in (new) systems. Better use of available resources seems to be a better alternative. Third, hospital directors can't reduce information management to the secondary processes; they also include the primary processes. A multidisciplinary design of information management seems to be a good approach. Fourth, there must be a hospital broad awareness of the importance of information management. If not, it will be a waste of design efforts and it will be hard to achieve things. The design of information management is therefore to a certain extent a change question. Hence, this requires clear vision.