

SUMMARY

Recent policy of the Dutch Government is to make quality of health care visible and measurable by means of performance indicators. This policy has two purposes: the arrangement of a transparent way of public accountability and the stimulation of health care organizations and workers (professionals) to improve the quality of their work. The literature about indicators makes clear that these different purposes need their own indicators. Important differences exist between 'internal' and 'external' indicators. Internal indicators have to be detailed and to give specific insight in the process of care. External indicators have to give a global insight in processes and outcomes. They have to be valid and give insight in relevant differences in the context of organizations. Validation is necessary to make fair and real comparisons. The question raised in this thesis is whether it is possible with the developed set of performance indicators for hospitals to simultaneously realize the goals of external accountability and internal quality-improvement.

Research has been done into the way a hospital has given form and content to the external performance indicators. Specifically, the research asks if and in which way performance indicators are internalised and if there is a connection between internalisation and the improvement of the practice of care. The research-question was: *How does the process of internalisation of the external performance indicators decubitus ulcers and pain after operative surgery in the Saint Lucas Andreas Hospital take place?*

To answer the research question an explorative qualitative research has been performed in the Saint Lucas Andreas Hospital. The hospital is a non-academic, top clinical educational hospital and affiliated to the quality improvement program Better Faster (Sneller Beter). The hospital acts in the very competitive environment of the Amsterdam region. In this research the process of internalisation of two specific indicators has been pictured: decubitus ulcers and pain after operative surgery. Data collection for this research took place through an analysis of documents, semi-structured interviews and observations of the nursing care process at several nursing departments.

This case study demonstrates that performance indicators in the Saint Lucas Andreas Hospital have led to a process of internalisation. The process has been started with the recognition of the interest of performance indicators by hospital management. The obligation to report every year at the set of performance indicators has led to a structure of responsibilities and a 'standard method' of data collection. In this way performance indicators have been made 'working' for external accountability. The performance indicators also have set in motion a process of quality-improvement. Lower than average scores at the indicators decubitus ulcers and pain, experienced external pressure from the Health Inspectorate (IGZ) and the health insurance company AGIS and fear for loss of reputation, were important triggers. This has led to an analysis of care, detection of problems in the working-process and new care policies. With the help of quality-projects of the program Better Faster a cyclic process of quality-improvement for decubitus ulcers as well as pain has been achieved. In this way in the Saint Lucas Andreas Hospital, the external performance indicators have also been made 'working' for the improvement of the quality of care. In this process the quality improvement program Better Faster has been used as a vehicle for further internalisation of performance-indicators in the organization.

The conclusion of this research is that the twofold purpose of the performance indicators for both aspects of care has been reached. This case suggests that the process of internalisation of the performance indicators can lead to improvement of the quality of care. Further the research demonstrates that the performance indicators decubitus ulcers and pain are useful as an instrument for accountability (external purpose) and as an instrument for improvement (internal purpose). This finding contributes to a reconceptualisation of the distinction between internal and external indicators, supporting Bal's suggestion that indicators are not 'in essence' internal or external, but have to be made such in processes of internalisation and externalisation.