Three major challenges that will transform hospitals in Kenya

Kenyan hospitals are privileged to have a geographical vantage in Eastern Africa. It is supported with infrastructures that allow linkages not only with the region but extending to Central Africa and Southern Africa, north of South Africa by both road and air. In addition, it has been credited with having the most specialized healthcare workers in the region, thus allowing it an opportunity to offer superior services.

However, it is fraught with challenges that make this difficult. Despite having a heritage of health facilities from the colonial period which have increased in number to cater for the Kenyans and the region, the human resources for health care remain few. This is due to the unequal distribution which concentrates mainly in the towns in search of quality education for their children and themselves.

Secondly, supply chain excellence has been evasive due to government legislation. In 2019, the health sector has suffered shortages in medication, consumables and certain implants and devices due to implementation of extended COC. This has improved the hospital relationships since they have had to borrow from one another. However, there are many times when there has been service failure which has led to disillusioned patients and frustration of the doctors.

Thirdly, Kenya has experienced digital growth in both telecommunication and banking. This has transformed the citizenry to independence, entitlement and empowerment since they are in control of their transactions and have visibility of their portfolios in both sectors. However, hospitals and the healthcare payers have lagged in digital transformation, thus leading to lack of shared data, lack of standardization, no predictive analysis and hence a reactive system with long waiting times. This has edged the Kenyans and the region, the human resources for health care remain few. This is due to the unequal distribution which concentrates mainly in the towns in search of quality education for their children and themselves.

Opportunities and solutions to the challenges

In order to address the challenge of inadequate human resources for health, training of rare yet necessary cadres, has been ongoing to fill the gap. The cadres are focused on including health records information officers and emergency medicine technicians (EMTs). Substitution has also been adopted to ensure each Kenyan receives medical attention. This involves the training of nurse and clinical officer specialists to deploy them where doctors are lacking or too few. Utilization of retired nurses and mid-wives as community health care workers and birth attendants. Ensuring equitable social amenities across the country to reduce the rural-urban migration.

Supply chain excellence can be achieved through increased capacity of local pharmaceutical manufacturers, making has made medication accessible, affordable and available. However, we are still dependent on overseas manufacturers for more complex molecules, implants and devices.

Agile adoption of technology will be useful in the digitization of hospitals. In addition, collaboration, coordination and communication between hospitals and with payers would be useful towards shared health information, continuity of patient care and utilization of big data for decision making. Currently, the District Health Information System is in place and tracks the parameters that have been prioritized by the Ministry of Health.

Uncertainties regarding hospitals’ response (leadership and governance)

The political environment keeps changing legislation that affects supply chain management, thus leading to poor service delivery. The current guidelines on human resource recruitment and deployment are also affected by the political priorities.

Leadership will also play a crucial role in sense-making and building teams that are motivated by emergence and innovation even in challenging situations. Therefore, inclusion of leadership training of residents in the medical school and mentoring and coaching of current leaders will be useful in this. Moreover, recruitment for competence and not for ethnicity is encouraged.

Governance which rewards good and shuns evil will also be crucial in turning the tide for hospitals. This would include good stewardship of public resources such as the Managed Equipment Services, which included the equipping of government facilities with equipment like ventilators, dialysis machines, CT scanners and MRI scanners. This can be extrapolated to value-based compensation of providers in order to promote ethical practice and good outcomes within the stipulated guidelines while financially protecting patients and stretching the few resources diverted to private health insurance.

About the Nairobi Hospital

Opened in 1954, the Nairobi Hospital has excelled in medical expertise and services provision and has deservedly earned recognition throughout East Africa and beyond as an advanced diagnostic, treatment and referral center. Expansive investment in the latest technology and medical equipment has enabled us to establish leadership in medical procedures both in Kenya and outside.