EFFICIENCY
PROPOSED SYNOPSIS OF BETTER PRACTICE

World Health Organization (WHO) Developing Efficiency Measures

Section I: Summary

The World Health Report 2000 Health Systems: Improving Performance attempted to calculate efficiency by looking at the ratio of health system performance to expenditure after adjusting for presumed uncontrollable influences of performance. The goal of the report was to analyze the role of health systems and suggest ways to make them more efficient, accessible, and responsive to people not benefiting from them in select countries.

However, the WHO methodology for measuring efficiency was widely criticized due to their methods for measuring performance, treatment of missing or poor quality of data, and econometric methods. Specifically, the Report lacked agreement about the best method for measuring health attainment or level of responsiveness, limited consensus on the selection and weighting of normative values assigned to health, responsiveness, and financing as well as the unavailability or unreliability of secondary data sets, such as estimation techniques, used.

Section II: Statement of purpose

Even though the average life expectancy and other health status indicators in most countries have improved over the years, gaps continue to exist between the potential of health systems and their actual performance. In addition, variation in health outcomes continues among counties with comparable resources.

The goal of the WHO Report was to analyze the role of health systems and suggest ways to measure them to create targets to make them more efficient, accessible, and responsive to the people benefiting from the system.

The WHO Report includes discussion on the:
- Organization, rules and incentives that best assist health systems to use resources to achieve goals;
- Best ways to create resources—people, buildings, equipment, knowledge—and mistakes to avoid;
- Financing best practices; and
- Recommendations for constant oversight of health systems to monitor goals and the extent that financing, investing, and delivering services are adequately carried out.

In particular, the Report uses performance measures to measure health system goal attainment using the level and distribution of health, level and distribution of responsiveness and distribution of costs. These composite measures are then compared to the level of resources invested in select countries.

Section III: Outcomes

Even though the Report increased overall awareness of the health systems and exhibited innovative ways to evaluate goals, performance and efficiency in select counties, according to the World Health Organization director-general, Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, "many of the concepts and measures used in the report require refinement and development." Critics of the Report have additionally suggested that before additional reports measuring the efficiency of health care systems across counties can occur, there needs to be better consensus, among policy makers and academics, about the reliability of methods and information sources as well as agreement on key (1-2 versus multiple) indices used to measure health system performance.

However, the report, criticisms, and suggested modifications can serve as a lesson learned for countries wishing to develop ways to measure health care delivery, system and care efficiencies.

Section IV: Contact Information and References

Sources of Information

World Health Organization. "The World Health Report 2000—Health Systems: Improving Performance." Available at http://who.int/whr/2000/en/index.html. Accessed on November 20, 2008.

Wibulpolprasert, Suwit and Viroj Tangcharoensathien. "Health System Performance —what's next? Editorial." Bulletin of the World Health Organization, 2001, 79 (6): 489. Available at http://www.who.int/health-system-perforamance/docs/efficattain_docs.htm. Accessed on November 20, 2008.