



**Best Practice Summary
Nueva Vizcaya Province, Philippines**

Country:	Philippines
Local Government:	Nueva Vizcaya Province
Type:	Province
Best Practice Title:	Treating Citizens as Customers
Aspect of Governance:	Thematic Area 3: Inclusive Urban Public Services
Reported By:	Galing Pook Foundation
Start Date:	1998
Website:	http://www.nuevavizcaya.gov.ph/

Description:

Background

The Problem:

The devolution of health services from the national to the local level in the early 1990s led at first to demoralisation within the health services and a decline in service quality as local government units (LGUs) struggled to find the funds to keep the services running.

The administration of five hospitals in the province of Nueva Vizcaya, a smallish province in Northern Luzon with a population of around 335,000 people, was devolved from the Department of Health (DOH) to the provincial government. These were all relatively small local hospitals, ranging from the 50-bed Nueva Vizcaya Provincial Hospital to the 10-bed Kasibu Municipal Hospital. One of them, the Veterans Regional Hospital, was eventually returned to the DOH. However, the operating costs of the remaining four hospitals amounted to 50 million pesos annually, a substantial slice of the province's annual budget.

The so-called 'second class' province, divided into 15 municipalities and 275 barangays, has an annual income of only 207 million PHP, i.e. the budget for the four hospitals used up nearly a quarter of the total available funds.

The quality of service at these newly devolved hospitals was low with many complaints from patients and other health-care customers about unacceptable behaviour and conduct of staff which led to poor care and general dissatisfaction with the services provided by the provincial government.

There were previous attempts to introduce a culture of quality amongst health care personnel on which the Quality Service Improvement Programme (QSIP) could build, for example the creation of a Provincial Health Board (PHB) in 1992. This was aimed at giving NGOs and POs a more active role in the government of the province, in the hope that this would lead to more community-friendly services. However, despite the PHB receiving awards in 1994 and 1995 and innovating both procurement and personnel policies, the complaints from dissatisfied patients and other stakeholders continued unabated. An investigation showed that this was due mainly to the unacceptable behaviour of frontline staff and a new project was designed to change the mind set of health sector employees who had to learn that – even though health services and medicines were disbursed for free to the general public – patients had a right to professional and courteous service delivery.

Objectives

The Programme:

In May 1998, the provincial government of Nueva Vizcaya formally initiated the Quality Service Improvement Programme (QSIP), challenging both health agencies and health workers to be more considerate and responsive to the needs of their clients.

Overall Objective:

The main goal of the programme was to achieve customer satisfaction with the health services provided through changes to the system as well as the behaviour of staff that would lead to a reduction if not elimination of complaints.

Specific Objectives:

- To change the behaviour of hospital staff by encouraging them to treat the public as customers, stakeholders and partners in the attainment of good health;
- To increase customer satisfaction through the implementation of improvements to the services;
- To ensure that procedures were customer-friendly;
- To encourage feedback from customers/patients by introducing a customer feedback mechanism;
- To minimise conflicts by creating a venue for health agencies and communities where concerns could be discussed and resolved quickly before escalating.

Activities

- *Envisioning the ideal service organisation:* Health service managers were asked to draft their own service vision, values and strategies, inspired by the service culture in private companies.
- *Carrying out a service audit:* The Quality Service Improvement Programme (QSIP) team analysed how their agency was currently serving the public – in terms of services offered, processes involved, procedures, time and motion studies, common problems encountered – and also conducted a survey of employers and customers.

- *Planning for change:* The survey results were evaluated and weak points/problems identified. This led to the formulation of service improvement recommendations and an agency action plan for each agency.
- *Implementing changes:* The action plans were implemented and employees underwent basic customer-service skills training. Following that, a second survey was carried out to determine whether there had been improvements in service quality.
- *Participating in health sector management and development:* several policy recommendations that emerged from the action plans and staff surveys were taken up by the general management of the health service. These included the creation of a Service Excellence Council to monitor programme implementation and assist the PHB in ensuring quality healthcare; the implementation of a Drug Supplementation Program to ease the periodic shortage of medicines in hospitals; and the adaptation of a dress code amongst health workers to easily identify them from customers.

Results

- *Improved staff capability:* 80% of local government's health employees took part in the basic customer-service skills training which increased their awareness of proper customer service management. Health workers started taking part in policy formulation for health services and employees' moral improved as they found themselves empowered to implement reforms within their levels.
- *Increased customer satisfaction:* The second survey that was conducted after the implementation of the action plans and staff training showed significant improvement in patient satisfaction with the services they received.
- *Introduction of a special selection and promotion process for health workers:* Upon the recommendation of the PHB, the governor created a special selection and promotion process for health workers. This process allowed them to directly participate in the selection of new employees and the promotion of their peers, which contributed to the improvement in services that had led to a significant decline in customer complaints.
- *Increased networking and coordination amongst health workers:* a dynamic two-way referral system was established amongst hospitals. The level of inter-agency support established in that way helped to ensure that delivery of services, especially in the bigger hospitals went uninterrupted.

Lessons Learnt

By focusing on service delivery and providing staff training as well as empowering personnel to take responsibility within the decision making process, the local health board found that not only customer satisfaction went up and the number of complaints dropped, but also that staff satisfaction increased and the quality of care improved. It was also noted that a participatory approach to personnel management led to an increase in staff motivation and service improvements.

Sustainability

Since the programme actually led to savings within the healthcare system of the province, it was possible to make money available for future staff training. The measures that had been introduced to encourage staff to participate in decision making and to increase coordination amongst the health services have remained in place, so that the hospitals continue to be well managed.



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