HEALTH MANAGEMENT

Long-term Care as an Urgent Challenge

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Abstract

Long-term care is a relatively closed system of health care and social care services and assistance that has developed as a response to the needs of those who due to disability, chronic health conditions, trauma or disease limiting their self-care capabilities and independence, are in need of assistance and support of third persons for a prolonged period of time. Long-term care within the public services system does not exist in Slovakia (Ref. 12). Full Text (Free, PDF) www.bmj.sk.

Key words: health care, public services system, social care, long-term care.

Care for chronically ill and disabled persons and steep rise in the numbers of elderly are a major and growing challenge in developing countries (1). Long-term care for people with chronic illnesses and disabilities presents an urgent challenge around the world. A recent WHO study estimates that in many developing countries the need will increase by as much as 400% in coming decades (2). It is the recognized fact that with advancing age, the likelihood of developing health problems and chronic disease will increase and the demand for health care resources will escalate. This will impact hospitals and long-term care facilities (3).

Care for chronically ill and geriatric patients has become the key issue of the current health policy and will remain one of the top priorities in the following century, as well. More and more people are reaching good old age and they will experience a shift from acute diseases to chronic ones and different causes of death (4). The high costs of treating chronic diseases suggest that reducing their prevalence would improve Medicare’s financial stability (5). The formulation of policies needs to reflect these countries’ unique conditions (6). Some potential health and social policies take many years to implement. These include developing caregivers support structures, building up insurance funds to pay for long-term care or training health professionals. The need for these must therefore be anticipated years or decades in advance (7). Long-term care within the public services system does not exist in Slovakia.

Defining long-term care

Individuals need long-term care (LTC) due to disability, chronic condition, trauma or illness, which limit their ability to carry out basic self care or personal tasks that must be performed every day (8). Long-term care refers to the provision of services for persons of all ages who have long-term functional dependency (6). LTC is a range of services needed for persons who are dependent on help with basic activities of daily living (ADLs). This central personal care component is frequently provided in combination with help with basic medical services such as help with wound dressing, pain management, medication, health monitoring, prevention, rehabilitation or services of palliative care (9)

Target population

The population in need of long-term care includes all those who suffer from any kind of physical or mental disability. The focus, derived from the above definition of LTC, is on the care of persons with long-term health problems who need assistance with the activities of daily living. This target population includes persons of all ages who are experiencing some degree of functional dependence, as well as their care providers (10). Target groups include:

- people who are chronically ill, whether with communicable diseases such as tuberculosis or with noncommunicable conditions such as cardiovascular diseases and cancer,
– individuals with disabilities, regardless of etiology, including developmental disabilities and disabilities caused by poliomyelitis,
– people with HIV/AIDS,
– people disabled by accidental injuries, e.g. victims of traffic accidents,
– people with sensory limitations,
– mentally ill individuals, including those suffering from depression and dementia,
– substance-dependent individuals,
– victims of natural and other disasters,
– perhaps most importantly, informal caregivers for any of the above, such as family, friends and neighbours (11).

The need for LTC policy in developing countries

The trends in developing countries clearly indicate the growing need for long-term care. These trends reflect two interrelated processes. One is the growth in factors that increase the prevalence of long-term care disability in the population. The second is the change in the capacity of informal support system to address these needs (10). The need for LTC is determined by the interaction of the rate of increase in disability levels and the rate of change of the informal network and its capacity. For the most countries, the development of public policies to address the consequences of these changes has become urgent (6). Nevertheless, needs and demand for LTC are growing steadily and the need for increased access to effective long-term care is becoming a pressing issue in practically all societies (12).

Conclusion

Long-term care is closely interlinked with other programmes and systems, which can reduce the need for long-term care or which complement it. The task of health care is to reduce the need for long-term care by means of early diagnosis of a condition likely to lead to a handicap, including early diagnosis in the newborn.

Initially, long-term care policies were formulated as a response to ageing of the population, which brought about growing needs of elderly people for social care and health care, and was associated with relatively rapid increases of necessary costs. In developed countries, current long-term care focuses on all age groups in need of assistance and support from others due to the limitations caused by their state of health. Long-term care within the public services system does not exist in Slovakia.

References


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