Transformational Packages in Medical Sciences Education; the Importance of Roadmap

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Dear Editor,

The existence of an effective health service delivery system is closely linked to the status of medical education. Although we have seen significant breakthroughs in the field of medical education in recent decades, the system has also faced challenges over the past few years and these challenges have necessitated reforms in this area. In this regard, the Ministry of Health and Medical Education of Iran started the transformation program of the medical education sector in 2014 (1).

Implementing medical sciences education packages can be a good response to environmental changes. These packages will affect all stakeholders in the field of higher education. Therefore, along with the positive effects of their proper implementation on these stakeholders, if not properly implemented, they can be regarded as unsuccessful reforms and have devastating effects on the medical education of the country. In addition, at a larger scale, reform has always been one of the signs of success or failure of governments, and in future, packages will also be used as a criterion for judging the performance of the government in the field of health higher education.

Although the educational transformation program is presented in separate packages to medical universities and this helps them to be better implemented, because of some of their features, their implementation has its own complexities.

Educational development packages cover a wide range of audiences, including students and faculty members, and vary greatly in function. These packages fall into the different content-based, process-based, output-driven, contextual, and monitoring groups. Various departments of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education and the universities of medical sciences of the country have been introduced as implementing units of packages. The level of interventions of these packages also varies and encompasses different academic, regional, national, committee and international levels (2).

The interventions needed to implement educational packages vary with respect to implementation period, and some of them such as infrastructure have a short-term vision, and some, such as future studies, have a longer-term vision.

Iran's Higher Education Transformation Program is one of the health reform programs, and considering the challenges of such reform programs in the country can help better implement these packages. The following strategies appear to have a serious impact on the better deployment of packages.

The need for a comprehensive roadmap: A roadmap is one of the future studies tools which is a method of discovering and describing a desirable future and explaining the way to achieve it in a simple and understandable language for the organization. Roadmap is a powerful tool for supporting plans and provides the information, processes and tools needed. Roadmaps are compiled to identify and remove implementation constraints (3). As a result, the tool is expected to create the desired outlook, identify and build new capacities and capabilities, and take advantage of opportunities in the future. Also, with this approach, problems and failures due to the future conditions of the packages can be identified and resolved.

Obviously, for the proper formulation of roadmap packages, requirements such as top management's commitment to roadmap development and implementation, use of training experts' expertise, use of appropriate roadmap frameworks, use of appropriate criteria for roadmap selection and empowering package stakeholders are essential in delineating the roadmap (identifying the process, determining the stimulants, as well as identifying and analyzing alternatives and selecting from among them).

Another requirement for package roadmaps is to make the necessary map modifications based on a forward-looking approach. Being aware of future opportunities and threats both nationally and internationally and making the necessary changes will make the packages sustainable and cause the safe implementation of the plan. Observing variable factors such as training budget, new training needs and human resources status and making the necessary changes during implementation will have a significant impact on the success of the packages.

In addition to the importance of developing and following a proper roadmap, it seems that removing and reducing some of the common barriers to implementing health reform programs in the country through the following strategies is essential.

Coherence in concepts and strategies: Usually large-scale and upstream programs and the related strategies are formulated by policy makers, and although operational body participation is one of the requirements for such documents, its contribution to the formulation of the final version and the choice of words and phrases are not very significant. Therefore, the synergy between the ministry and the universities must be strengthened by certain mechanisms.

Strengthening teamwork and limiting isolated activities: To effectively deal with changing environmental conditions, the need to mobilize the power, knowledge, skills and expertise of all staff in teamwork is increasingly felt. This inter-team collaboration should be strengthened between different stakeholder groups, including ministries, districts and universities.

Creating opportunities for sharing knowledge and successful experiences: Perhaps one of the capabilities of this project is to identify successful experiences of universities in the field of medical sciences education and introduce them to other medical universities, which requires a rigorous program for using this potential.

Maximum participation of stakeholders: One of the most important features of a successful reform program is maximum stakeholder involvement during the process. It is, therefore, important to engage all the stakeholders, especially the faculty members and students, in this program in a variety of ways.

Interdepartmental coordination: Given that varying levels of cooperation such as ministries, districts, universities, and units within the university are responsible for implementing the package, accurate coordination between these units is essential and can prevent many re-workings. Sometimes the goals set forth in some development packages are in conflict with the current approaches and policies of the deputy of education of the respective ministry; for example, packages encourage universities to design interdisciplinary courses, while the policies of higher education expansion council do not necessarily abide expanding disciplines.

Educational transformation packages are a turning point in the field of medical sciences education in the country and all stakeholders should identify the operational barriers to make them more effective. In this regard, it seems that designing a comprehensive roadmap for the implementation of such packages along with enhancing dimensions such as synergy, teamwork, participation, program flexibility due to environmental changes and coordination among different stakeholders can boost the impact of these packages.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material(s) is available here [To read supplementary materials, please refer to the journal website and open PDF/HTML].

Footnotes

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