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Conference Abstract

Health Functional Units Sentinel Network: a learning device and decision support system in health functional units at primary health care level in Portugal

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Abstract

Purpose: It is necessary to mobilise the informational potential of FHU to be used as a support system for decision making and action.

Context: The recent Portuguese Primary Health Care (PHC) reform was presented as an extraordinary event and a marker of decisive times in Portuguese society by implementing a new model of primary health care services. This model is based on the principles of decentralisation, self-organisation, achievement of healthcare quality goals, performance indicators and on the accountability of self-motivated multi-professional teams. There are various kinds of functional health units which creation is based on those principles - care providing units such as Family Health Units (FHU) and support units. The WHO World Health Report 2008 has articulated the need to mobilise the production of knowledge at PHC level.

State of the art: The lack of information and knowledge about clinical, scientific, epidemiologic, organisational and health management issues due to changes recently introduced with the PHC reform, leads to a need for globalised strategies of information dissemination that could support research, enlarge epidemiological surveillance and improve health governance. The creation of sentinel healthcare units pretends to act as a learning device and a decision support system in the field of health data collection, which should be capable to extract relevant data in the source-systems, transfer it to data warehouses or datacentres, analyse it using data mining and statistical tools and report the results as useful information products back to the FHU and other stakeholders. These procedures aim to produce high quality information that would be necessary to scientific research, surveillance and management.

Statements for debate: For the development of the Portuguese PHC and to improve its quality, it is crucial to focus on the following areas of knowledge organisation: quality of care, integration of care, impact of care. The Health Functional Units Sentinel Network presents three main purposes in which of them should seek synergies and partnerships: "Research" (partnerships with academic institutions and institutions of R&D); "Surveillance" (partnerships with entities of health observation an epidemiological surveillance); "Clinical Governance" (partnerships with health management

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institutions). The methodology to be implemented to create the Health Functional Units Sentinel Network is bottom-up and with origin in a network of PHC functional units – Sentinel Units – linked and marked which will act as source-systems and, so, as providers of certain data sets, being responsible for its quality. This project design highlights a core of information governance responsible for integrated reflection and for defining policy regarding the use of the information about the reality(ies) under observation – “PHC Thinker” - with emphasis on the use and not only in its production.

Keywords:

primary health care, family health units, information systems, monitoring systems, sentinel networks, sentinel units

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