THAILAND HEALTHCARE SUMMIT

ORIGIN OF THE THAILAND HEALTHCARE SUMMIT

Thailand Healthcare Summit, a network for better health systems for the Thai people, has been initiated since 2011. The Summit is an annual collaboration between the government, private organisations, patient groups and the media, which come together to join seminars, exchange views, and discuss matters leading to the creation of a sustainable health policy for Thailand.

For 2013, the organizing committee selected the topic of “Healthcare in Thailand: From Standard Benefit Package to Medical Excellence”. This is because Thailand provides healthcare services from the government that cover all citizens, thus causing a huge burden on the budget and affecting the sustainability of the system.

Therefore, the government is trying to formulate measures to control medical costs, which may drag down the advancement of medical treatments. While providing benefits for everyone, the government also has to provide medical welfare according to its employment contract for civil officers and has to provide financial support to the social security fund. The government must also provide a proper choice of medical treatment for patients with the aim of maintaining medical excellence on par with international standards. Therefore, it is necessary that all parties in the healthcare system should propose ideas for balancing the medical budget and creating proper options of medical treatment for people.

The summit was honored to have Dr Kithma Yuthavong and Dr Apichat Sivayathorn as moderators.

HEALTH NETWORKS JOINING THE SUMMIT IN 2013 INCLUDE:

1. Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board  
2. The Medical Council of Thailand  
3. Social Security Office  
4. National Health Security Office  
5. Health Systems Research Institute  
6. Royal College of Family Physicians of Thailand  
7. Faculty of Medicine Ramathibodi Hospital, Mahidol University  
8. Faculty of Medicine Siriraj Hospital, Mahidol University  
9. Good Governance for Medical Executives Program, The Medical Council of Thailand – King Prachuphok Institute  
10. The Private Hospital Association  
11. The Pharmaceutical Industry Association (Thailand)  
12. Senior Government Officials Association of Thailand  
13. Pharmaceutical Research & Manufacturers Association  
14. Thai Self Medication Industry Association  
15. Officials’ Right Watch Club  
16. Patients’ Hope Givers Club  
17. Medical Services, Royal Thai Air Force

Thailand Healthcare Summit 2013 was divided into three sessions. The first seminar was about the Standard Package and Medical Excellence. The second seminar was about the nation’s goals for health under its resource constraints. Common goals and proposed solutions were defined in the seminar. The third seminar was about the results of the Summit and their broad application. Representatives from various agencies in the government and private sectors, including medical professionals and patients, joined the seminars to share their experiences. The seminars were all held at the Sukosol Hotel Bangkok on 21 June, 23 August and 29 October.
Thailand’s Healthcare System

Currently, Thailand provides comprehensive healthcare services created by the government that cover all citizens with health benefits and this has caused a huge budgetary burden. In addition to providing a standard benefit package for everyone, the government also has to provide medical welfare according to the employment contract for government officers and financial support to social security fund.

Therefore, the government must determine measures to control healthcare costs which may affect the progression of national medical treatment and may limit the choice of appropriate treatments for patients and adversely detract from the goals to achieve medical excellence at international standards. It is necessary that all parties in the health system bring a fine balance to improve efficiency and quality of healthcare services while also offering an alternative and proper treatment for patients.

The policy to provide free treatment to all people without screening proper recipients is the origin of the problems that undermine Thailand’s health system. It also causes the government to bear the burden of increasing costs and some people lack responsibility for their own health. Providing free treatment should be reserved for the poor. A good healthcare system is a system where people have the right to choose. Equity is not the same as equality. Everyone should be entitled to standard healthcare services whilst a better-quality service is offered to those who are willing to pay extra. Cost sharing and co-payment should start before people are sick such as by registering to get the government health insurance through social security.

The cost of the standard package for every Thai citizen should come from the National Health Security Office (NHSO). Top-up benefits should be paid by each fund and health insurance policies in which patients are members.
ปัญหาและการอุปสรรค


ระบบบริหารจัดการโรคระบาดเนื่องจาก
และควบคุมโรคระบาดและการรักษา


LACK OF CO-PLANNING AND PARTICIPATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR

There are many organisations in both the government and private sector related to the healthcare system. Nowadays, healthcare policies are rushed and ordered aggressively by the government sector without thorough discussion among related parties. This affects other health organisations and may impact the overall healthcare system in Thailand. Some policies are good for a short period, but they can have long term adverse impacts to the system ie. impacts of limitation of health budget on treatment quality. Negative attitudes between government and the private sector also affect work cooperation.

SOLUTION

The government and private sectors should work together more seriously in formulating policies, plans and measures for the healthcare system. All related organisations, including patient groups, should have a chance to take part in each seminar. Related parties should promote partnerships between the public and private sectors to achieve maximum value of health services for the country in the context of the law on public-private partnership which comes into force in 2013.
LACK OF HEALTHCARE PERSONNEL
At present, the number of patients in government hospitals is increasing but the number of medical staff is not enough to serve the increasing number of patients. Patients have to wait in a long queue to meet doctors for only 2-4 minutes which is not enough for diagnosis, treatment and proper communication for the thorough understanding of the patients. This leads to patients' misunderstandings and inability to care for themselves properly. Each doctor has to see patients during and after office hours for 90-120 hours per week which is much more than other professions. Health workers have to work hard and often lack the time to relax or get enough rest. This leads to increase risk for treatment errors and work related stress levels. When these staff have a choice, they often resign from government to work for private hospitals or work abroad where they receive higher salaries or better compensation with a more acceptable workload. Shortage of healthcare staff will impede the government’s hospitals from achieving medical excellence.

SOLUTION
Patients should be screened to reduce the burden for medical staff. Only patients in need to be seen by doctors should receive full treatment at hospitals. This will give doctors more time to spend on each patient. Creating understanding on disease prevention and providing self-care knowledge with non-prescription drugs from drug stores. There should also be a payment system in which private healthcare providers can participate to help take care of patients. In addition, improving the pay of healthcare personnel, according to workload and performance will incentivize and motivate them. Value on “quality of service” should be created and healthcare professionals should be invited to participate in designing and monitoring the quality of service.

RISING NUMBER OF PATIENTS AND INCREASING DEMAND FOR HIGHER MEDICAL STANDARDS
Hospitals in remote areas still don’t have enough medical equipment and staff, especially specialists. This causes patients to spend travelling costs in order to get better treatment at hospitals that have more potential. According to the current economic and social situation in Thailand, people have to work hard to earn enough to meet their demands. Most people get stressed and lack sufficient care for their health. Some want to see doctors even with minor illness. The patients referral system is not good ie. lack of good cooperation. Hospitals that patients are referred to sometimes do not receive patients' details so patients do not receive appropriate treatment. When patients’ symptoms improve from treatment at medical centers, they are sent back to general hospitals where the treatment standard is downgraded so symptoms may recur.

SOLUTION
A systematic procedure of patient referral should be organised. The most important thing is to educate the public with health knowledge and encourage them to take care of their health. Small fee for a doctor’s visit can reduce number of minor illness visit. This will give doctors more time to spend with patients. A system to reward people who stay healthy should be set up. Meanwhile, there should be measures to punish patients who are at risk of getting diseases in order to urge public health-conscious.
The 30th national health care policy is approaching critical point because the growth of per capita budget is rising faster than the national income. The country already faces heavy budget burden due to the lack of a co-pay system. The government had to control per capita budget and hospitals save cost for personnel, medical equipment, and drugs, which in turn affect the quality of care. In fact government’s public health budget is still small compared to other countries, particularly in Asia. The government should increase health budget, especially for investment in public hospitals under Ministry of Health which has been deprived for a long time which affects the quality of life for both patients and service providers and quality of medical care.

“Free treatment policy is one factor that restrains the development of Thailand’s health care system, as it not only costs the Government excessive health budget but also makes people feel no obligations to care for their health since they do not need to worry about medical bills. The policy also limit patients’ choice of treatment, and think that free treatment should be reserved only for the poor. In good healthcare system, people should have the right to choose what they want and there must be no absolute limitation. Equities does not mean equality for all. Everyone has the right to get access to healthcare services but may not get exactly the same treatment or benefits. Good healthcare system must allow competition in services and people must have the right to pay for better or additional treatments.

“In the past, we saved costs by using cheap products. Presently, we should change the way of saving by not using unnecessary things. For example, in the past, some doctors used low quality drugs which was not effective and patients who received but did not use the drugs may discard them because they did not appreciate the value. We should use only good drugs and only when necessary. This will help make treatment better and cheaper. Treatment failure will lead to complications which are more expensive to treat. Doctors alone cannot help save patients’ life without good quality drugs and effective medical equipment.”
Air Vice Marshal Ittaporn Kanacharon, M.D.,
Director of the Good Governance for Medical Executives Program, The Medical Council of Thailand and King Prachaphiphat’s Institute

The health system in Thailand needs adjustment between demand and supply according to current situation and a long term plan to accommodate the increase in the number of elderly people in the future. Health budget should be appropriate for the workforce. Effective management of the system is important because it will help to continuously develop the healthcare system. In addition, creating public understanding about each fund’s benefits using IT on demand and social media channels is essential. It will help patients understand the details and payment processes. Information should be shared with hospitals and medical institutes under supervision of five ministries to ensure transparency and increase workflow efficiency. Medical Excellence Centers are also needed at local level nationwide, especially in universities, in order to help patients save travel cost and to develop more medical personnel at regional level.

“A research was recently conducted by students in the Good Governance for Medical Executives Program, The Medical Council of Thailand and King Prachaphiphat’s Institute on the topic of ‘Appropriate cost sharing system for sustainable healthcare in Thailand’. Survey of opinions and willingness to co-pay of stake holders in Thai healthcare system revealed that good healthcare system should offer access to basic standard medical treatment for all citizen. Poor people should get care from the Government and having to pay any medical costs. People with income should pay as appropriate, if they want to receive a higher quality of medical treatment. Each individual should have the right to choose a medical plan from the start of their working life, i.e. the pre-paid insurance systems used in many other countries. People who can help pay will enhance the development of Thailand’s healthcare system standards of all people.”

Dr. Seree Nonthasoot
Senior Executive Vice President, Institute of Research and Development for Public Enterprises (IRDP)

“Health system in Thailand has a clear separation of role of each organisations i.e., policy formulation, regulation, purchase etc. which help improve efficiency. In order to further improve the effectiveness of the healthcare system, division of function and service between public and private sectors in healthcare system should be less and public-private partnerships (PPP) should be increased to best share resources of the national healthcare system.

In the context of the new legislation effective 2013, public and private sectors are allowed to co-invest and co-ownership between the 2 sectors is encouraged. Some initiatives should be considered and implemented as soon as possible. Private sector can provide modern medical tools in or for government hospitals such as MRI services, CT Scan, Catheterization lab (Cath lab), Peritoneal Dialysis or Hemodialysis service. Such cooperation can help expand service and elevate treatment standard in public health services without building new hospital in different regions that still have problems accessing public healthcare and so have to rely on the private sector. This will also lessen the burden and strengthens capacity to allocate government resources to improve other services for healthcare.”

Jakee Chalitpibool
Chairman of Patient’s Hope Givers Club

“I have been working for the Patients’ Hope Givers Club for four years now. I always emphasize that medical privileges and patients’ duty go together. Everyone has to understand that we cannot only demand privileges without taking care of our own health. As patients, we need accurate and timely diagnosis and we want doctors to provide the best care before having to worry about reimbursement or which fund we belong to. When standard of medical care is determined by the budget, patients could lose the chance to get better treatment. However, in reality, quality care and limited budget seem to go opposite directions. One day if one of our family members feel sick, would we ask doctors: What would be the best treatment available? or what would be the most affordable treatment?

“I believe that every patient wants to be offered medical care without having to worry about their coverage entitlement or how much they could reimburse. The current government funded healthcare is good. However, if people can copy to get better or additional treatment, that would help increase efficiency of medical care and relationship between doctors and patients could also improve. Looking ahead, I am going to get old and I will get sick at some point. My family members will too. Who knows what Thailand’s healthcare system would be like at that time. Will I have more options by then?”
Management reform for sustainable healthcare budget should focus on sources of funds, including budget from taxes or cost sharing in order to provide health coverage to all citizens and maintain medical excellence in the country. Looking back to the early stages of the establishment of the universal coverage system, most people not in the civil service medical benefit or social security system are informal workers, jobless, children and the elderly or disadvantage groups so co-payment was not introduced. Furthermore, both the governments by policy and fiscal policy have no clear plans. This makes Thailand’s healthcare insurance development which relates to medical system progress cannot reach clear goals. Health resources are also not managed efficiently. Moreover, budget constraints in the public sector cause many hospitals to operate with loss and must use their existing resources economically, ceases development and no investment in expensive equipments.

“We have research on the topic of “Sustainable Financing and Reform of National Health Insurance System in Thailand”, from which we proposed the idea of developing standardized healthcare benefits that fit all citizens and allowing each health fund to top up healthcare benefits for medical excellence. This can be done by incorporating option options according to the conditions of each fund. In case of additional purchase of healthcare insurance (see illustration), coordination of insurance claims between private sector insurance companies and government hospitals is still problematic. The solution is for government hospitals to build a system to receive medical claims from insurance companies as well as add-on medical benefits from the government. This will increase hospital revenues. Rewarding people who stay healthy is another good idea ie, discount insurance premium or co-payment rate. The cost-sharing payment system is also interesting because, today, free healthcare services can be a reason for overuse of healthcare facilities.”
The best solution for Thailand to develop a healthcare system towards excellence is to facilitate public-private partnerships (PPP). All parties have to accept the reality of the difference between public but similar groups can join together. A PPP law is now in place and can be applied to various industries. Examples of cooperation between public and private hospitals are sharing medical equipment, borrowing hospital beds in order to save costs. The money saved can be used to develop healthcare systems for further excellence.

"For some PPP issues, a win-win outcome has yet to be finalized. For example, the emergency treatment at any hospital initiative still has problems from a practical perspective because private hospitals have to bear too much cost. This should be seriously discussed in order to improve the system. Developing basic medical benefit package is essential. I do not believe that providing excellent treatment will create inequality because all citizens are entitled to receive some benefit from the government. Cost sharing is necessary and the quality of drugs must not be cut because it will affect the quality of patient care.

"We should all prepare for AEC. The government sector must allocate funds for development of healthcare systems otherwise Thailand will lose many capable medical personnel to other countries. There should also be the reward and punishment systems in place in order to modify health risk behaviors. Educating the public about how to care for their own health is the most important. All parties involved must work together with the media to spread information if need be to be in the right place at the right time."

Chaisit Sritongchal, M.D.
Director of the Office of Quality Control and Health Assessment of the National Health Security Office

"All people should be entitled to receive quality standard benefit packages. While their current rights to privileges should also be maintained. The best solution for medical excellence is to have a sufficient health budget and people who know how to take care of their health to avoid becoming sick as much as possible so the budget could be used for health system development towards medical excellence. Local administration departments should be involved in development for medical excellence.

"The creation of a network of hospitals is one of the keys to excellence of medical treatment. In the past, some patients with acute heart attack did not receive the best treatment and died. Now, with many networks linking small hospitals to more advanced medical centers nationwide, patients can get faster and better diagnosis and treatments. Hospitals in the networks must have knowledgeable and experienced doctors and medical personnel, along with appropriate medical devices and effective drugs, in order to be able to treat emergency patients in a timely manner and provide advice that are beneficial to patients."

Chirapras Guaprunwatt
Director of Strategic and Social Planning Department, Office of the National Economics and Social Development Board (NESDB)

"If you want the country to have an excellent healthcare system, public and private sectors must work together. Public-Private Partnership (PPP) should be implemented similarly to development of other basic infrastructure."

Nun. Chittakorn, Chairman
Director of Health Research and Development of Office of the National Economics and Social Development Board (NESDB)

"The government has planned to plan a national health package for patients who need medical treatment. However, this system is not suitable for patients who need a long period of care. For those patients who encounter difficulties in hospitalization and hospital treatment, the government and private sectors should work together. The government has planned to implement a new health package for patients who need a long period of care. The package should be implemented by the Ministry of Health and the Phuket Health Care Center in order to provide the best services for patients."

Witthaya Thongpsi, M.D.
Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Phuket University

"The college has planned to implement a new health package for patients who need a long period of care. The package should be implemented by the Ministry of Health and the Phuket Health Care Center in order to provide the best services for patients. Additionally, the college has planned to implement a new health package for patients who need a long period of care. The package should be implemented by the Ministry of Health and the Phuket Health Care Center in order to provide the best services for patients."

Therdsa Rojarakrittik, M.D., Ph.D.
Chairman of Medical Consultant Committee, Thai Life Assurance Association

"To solve the health system problems in a broad perspective and towards medical excellence, development of the "add on" to top up the "standard benefit package" must be done. For example, patients can choose room types or ask to be treated with drugs that are not in the national essential drug list as the add on options.

"There should also be a systematic method to rank order of the patients to bring clarity of payment for both the patients and medical institutes' convenience. Costs of the standard package coverage all Thai people come from the National Health Security Office (NHSO) and costs for add on options can be claimed from each fund and from insurance companies of which patients are members."

"Having a clear system will help reduce conflicts while information and statistics can be gathered for further development of the paying system for medical benefits in the future."
Napat Puikkansat
Chairman of the Parents Club of the ADHD of Thailand

"With the help of Rama 9 temple and donors, the ADHD Parents Club of Thailand has for decades provided guidance on how to care for children with ADHD and offered assistance to their parents. Children with ADHD who have been well looked after by their parents have the ability to learn and succeed in the future. Today, children with ADHD only need to take medicine once a day before going to school and can study all day. However, children from lower social statuses do not have the same opportunity and their ADHD becomes more pronounced, creating problems in society.

"From my experience as a patient, the problem of Thai healthcare system is insufficient healthcare professionals and limited healthcare budget. Patients outside the healthcare system or who are just poor often seek treatment late and are not well taken care of because doctors have too many patients and do not have enough time. Doctor-patient communication still needs to be improved. Some patients have to wait for several months to get appointment with doctors and their illness get worse during the wait. I wish to see the restructuring of the entire healthcare system.

All patients, whether rich or poor, should have access to quality care and medicine so that they can recover fast and regain their quality of life.

"The government should increase its healthcare budget and focus on producing more good quality healthcare professionals. After all, health is indispensable: we cannot live without it."

Assoc. Prof. Anirut Pattaragarn
Department of Pediatrics, Siriraj Hospital

"Today, patients with kidney disease have to shoulder the burden of their disease themselves. They have to travel to hospitals that have the personnel and equipment they need, most of which are located in cities. Patients spend a lot on travel because the best hospitals are in different areas of the country to the ones in which they live. There are not enough medical devices or specialists. Related sectors should allocate sufficient medical specialists in each area.

"Sending patients to other hospitals depends on personal communication with the medical person. This is because there is no practical approach. Delivery systems for patients between effective hospitals should be improved. They should be made more practical and cover all hospitals and medical institutions in the country, not only those reporting to the Ministry of Public Health."

Amporn Charoenomsak
Pharmaceutical Research & Manufacturers Association (PREA)

"Providing both standard medical benefits and striving for medical excellence are essential for healthcare system and requires the presence of three factors: 1) efficient management of the Government’s health budget, 2) creation of choices for best treatments for patients and 3) sustainable healthcare financial system. These can be achieved by a cost sharing system developed with participation of all healthcare stake holders from the government, private sector or patients. Health education on prevention and treatment is also important."

Col. Asst. Prof. Kidapop Wathanakul, M.D.
Representative of Army Medical Department, Medical Association of Thailand and Royal College of Family Physicians of Thailand

"Health care is the duty of all citizens. The most prevalent diseases in future will be those that are non-communicable such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and obesity, which are all caused by dietary habits and improper routine habits.

"The healthcare system should reward those who maintain good health and those who never need to use the medical services provided by government hospitals. This would reduce congestion and give doctors more time to care for patients who really need it. For example, people whose health is good health could get a tax deduction or discount coupons to reduce the cost of living."
"Obstacle that hinder the development of medical services and public health to excellence in Thailand is the fact that most public hospitals under the supervision of the Ministry of Public Health which are providing medical care to most of the Thai people have not been allocated sufficient budgets. The deficiency lead to the lack of improvements of hospital facilities and modern technology. There are too many patients for public hospitals to accommodate. Patients are sleeping on spare beds, mats on balconies etc. Public hospitals also lack medical personnel. Patients have to spend almost an entire day waiting to see a doctor. There are still insufficient diagnostics devices such as CT scans and MRIs so waiting lists are long. The payment from the National Health Security Office to the hospitals are not enough. As a result, public hospitals don’t have enough money to improve patient treatment services. The National Drug Committee announced rules that require doctors in public hospitals to prescribe only medicines in the National Essential Drug list to patients from the three funds (Universal Coverage, Social Security and Civil Service Medical Benefit ). This causes patients to lose the opportunity to get the best treatment with the best and the most effective drugs."

"In other words, the use of financial imperatives to limit drugs on the drug list, will affect patients who may not be aware that they are not getting the best medication. The patients lost the opportunity to receive the best treatment because of the limitation of drugs, budgetary insufficiency, personnel loss, inadequate facilities and technology. As such, medical excellence remains for reality for the Thai Healthcare system."

Teera Chakajnarakorn
President of the Pharmaceutical Industry Association (Thailand)

"The universal coverage system was initiated in 2002 so it has been around for over a decade. Budget issues have always been problematic since the start at THB 1,200 per capita until THB 2,900 per capita for next year which amount to THB 140 billion per year or an increase of 240% during 10 years. Such exponential increase in expense is worrisome.

"Today, hospitals are overcrowded with patients due to free treatment policy. Number of patients per doctor is higher than should be. As result, doctor have not enough time to treat patients. Hospital pharmacists also cannot explain drug information in detail to patients due to the limitation of time. If the budget for medicines is separated, patients can then receive medicines from the pharmacies in their communities. Management of medicine budget will be more systematic and easily controlled. Co-payment system will also be more accessible, patients can choose to pay more in order to get a better drug or drugs not in the national list of essential drugs. In the near future when Thailand will be entering the aging society, Family Pharmacist under Home Care system will have a greater role. Separation of drug, from healthcare budget should be started to prepare for the changes in the future."

"ระบบหลักประกันสุขภาพสุ่มสั่น ซึ่งมีกำหนดระยะเวลาให้บริการเป็นเวลา 10 ปี ปัจจุบันนี้ ประชาชนไทยสามารถวางแผนการเงิน พร้อมกับการวางแผนสุขภาพ ได้ซึ่งเป็นสิ่งที่สำคัญอย่างยิ่ง ในการเตรียมตัวสู่การสูงอายุในอนาคต."
An alliance for better healthcare for Thai people

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