

The challenges of health care in Brazil

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Health is the citizen's greatest assets and it is essential so that each person can perform their functions in Society and contribute to the country's growth.

As an economic activity, it corresponds to almost 10% of the GDP and is one of the activities that creates jobs the most: about 4.5 million workers are directly employed in the field.

Brazil assumed in its Constitution the responsibility to provide to all citizens, as a right, Health with the principles of Universality, Equity and Integrality that supported the proposal for the creation of the SUS (Sistema Único de Saúde - Unified Health System), one of the largest health systems in the world considering the number of served citizens and the complexity of the service provision.

Even though the SUS is a huge social advance for the Brazilian population, the challenges for its effective implementation, effectively consisted of full high-quality services throughout the country and financial sustainability, are huge and must be overcome so that this goal can be attained.

There are huge inequalities in access when different regions of the country are compared, inequalities which are accentuated if we consider the distribution of income and the access, considering both the private and public systems as part of the SUS, where 25% of the population with health insurance receives 55% of the country's total

investments in health and the 75% of the population that depends exclusively on the public health system receives only 45%.

At the same time it is important to highlight the public SUS that worked. For instance, Brazil offers one of the greatest vaccine coverage in the world, treatment of AIDS and the Family Health programs developed in recent decades are other examples of well succeeded projects.

I emphasize some of the axes considered to be priorities by the *Instituto Coalizão Saúde*, which gathers the entire Health productive sector in Brazil, that need to be discussed so that a system which is really fairer and more effective can meet the needs of the Brazilian population:

Ethics and business conduct

Informality is one of the major barriers to the country's growth. If informality ended in Brazil the economy would grow in at least 1.5% of the GDP. The high taxes and the complex paperwork and high costs hamper the creation of new jobs and new businesses, essential for the health sector to produce more locally and import less.

The distribution of fake products such as drugs and prostheses jeopardizes the patient and the companies which are orderly established; it occurs in a systemic way throughout the country.

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The private-public relationship must be regulated by strict codes of ethics that benefit all those who work and pay taxes. Fighting illegality and misconduct is essential to ensure the quality of the products, to increase efficiency and revenue, to increase formal employment and to make the economy grow, benefiting the whole society.

Innovation

Innovation is essential for a country's technological development and economic growth. There is no effective health industrial policy that encourages the public-private partnerships for technology transfer and stimulates the participation of the universities in the process of developing innovative products. It is essential for Brazil to be able to develop technologies and products that can meet the needs of the population due to aging and the change in the epidemiological profile.

The excessive paperwork and the need for greater transparency and less politicization of the regulatory bodies hinder the advances in the health sector. The delays in updating the list of procedures and in the incorporation of new technologies to the SUS whose criteria should be improved to give greater weight to cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit.

The difficulty in conducting clinical studies, permeated by ideological reasons, shows the lack of strategies for innovation in the sector.

Public-private integration

The cooperation between the public and private sectors is vital in order to make the health system more efficient and effective and to improve the quality of health care to the population. The Federal Constitution establishes the participation of the private sector to supplement the SUS, and also states that health care is free for the private initiative. The integration of both systems is essential so that one can contribute to the better functioning of the other. Currently 64% of the total of beds in the country is managed by the private sector and 55% of the beds available to the SUS are from private institutions.

Public-private partnerships, both in service

and in the industrial sector, can foster innovation and competitiveness in the health area and stimulate the productive capacity and, especially, improve management.

Judicialization of health

The judicialization of health has been causing disorganization in the health sector and a huge economic impact mainly on States and Municipalities. An ever increasing number of lawsuits claiming treatment, drugs and therapeutic inputs, most of which are not included in the list of procedures by the SUS and ANS (National Supplementary Health Agency). Some drugs and inputs are not even registered in ANVISA. The mistaken constitutional interpretation that in Brazil patients are entitled to everything when it comes to the health area regardless of the cost and effectiveness leads to actions that take the already insufficient health resources away mainly from the population that has less access to them and diverts these resources to the richest part of the population, which has resources to promote these lawsuits. Along with this perverse aspect behind the actions, there is a mafia of doctors, lawyers and distributors who take advantage of the system to divert the SUS resources.

The State's criteria and bureaucracy for the evaluation and incorporation of new technologies and which should give greater relevance to cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness end up reinforcing the idea that only a lawsuit can give access to really important drugs for people who depend on the SUS.

A deeper debate about the role of the Judiciary regarding individual actions in the health area and the creation of specialized courts in the judiciary, in addition to the support of the Universities in the decision to incorporate new technologies and drugs, could be of great help solving this huge problem.

Health promotion

In recent years, the health policies have focused, except for vaccination programs, on programs for treating illnesses and for providing care to the population.

The initiatives for the promotion of the population's

health go far beyond the basic care services. Education in schools should include a program that aims to change eating habits, values physical activity, creates a negative environment for the use of drugs, tobacco and alcohol, encourage a disease prevention policy. The industry's involvement in the offering of healthier products and investments in sanitation would result in a healthier and more active population, and lower healthcare costs.

Regulation Rationalization

The Brazilian government, through the regulatory agencies, is generous in the editing of norms, laws, instructions, resolutions and ordinances which are often contradictory, which usually because of the inadequate structure of inspection, makes them ineffective, actually punishing those who comply with the law. Hospitals come to need more than 40 licenses, registrations and permits to operate.

It is necessary to rationalize the regulation, depoliticize the regulatory agencies whose positions are distributed as favors and not within technical criteria, reduce bureaucracy, facilitate the environment for those who create jobs and seek better care to the population.

Partnership with the technical and assistance body

Brazil is one of the countries that have the greatest number of labor claims in the world, the health area is extremely complex regarding issues such as health hazards and working hours. These issues do not always protect the worker, but often end up damaging relationships that need to be improved.

Technical autonomy is one of the most striking features of the medical profession and must live with the different kinds of working relationships. There is a growing demand for the meeting of health care protocols in the various organizations that mainly target the patient's protection, many of which are not always known or agreed with by the various professionals. Among the challenges faced by healthcare organizations is the withholding of medical talents. It is crucial to be able to offer proper working conditions and encourage good medical practice,

establishing lasting and positive relationships with its clinical staff.

Financial sustainability of the sector

The SUS presents huge difficulties when it comes to financial sustainability, the resources allocated to the public system are insufficient to meet the demands established in the Constitution and for the need to incorporate new technologies and drugs worsened by an aging population and the increase in chronic diseases. The system is completely underfunded. The sector faces problems regarding its development, with a high tax burden on the goods and services that are essential to the life of the Brazilians. Inadequate compensation models generate misalignment between cost increases and the effective quality of healthcare for the population. The shortage of skilled labor and funding hinder the expansion of the sector.

The Brazilian government invests less than what would be the minimum necessary in health. The Hospitals make beds unavailable due to a lack of adequate funding despite the existing lack of beds. The management of the public system is far from an acceptable standard.

A greater integration between the public and private sectors can be of great value to improve health care quality in the country.

The axes raised by the *Instituto Coalizão Saúde* reveal the major problems to be overcome in the mission of seeking to provide the Brazilian population with a decent, high-quality health care, and certainly the central problems are the public sector management in particular and the adequate financing.

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