



Extract from the report to the
Public Accounts Committee on
the quality programmes at Danish
hospitals

February
2012

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I. Introduction and conclusion

1. This report is about the Danish national quality improvement programmes that the Ministry of Health and Prevention (the Ministry of Health) and the regions have implemented to ensure and develop the quality of healthcare at the hospitals.

2. The focus on quality of healthcare, also at hospitals, has increased since the 1990s and provides the background for this report. Several initiatives have been implemented on a national and regional level to ensure and develop the quality of healthcare provided at the hospitals. The national quality initiatives determine the framework and direction of the hospital departments' work with quality, and the hospital staff is responsible for ensuring and developing the quality of the interaction with the patients.

This report also follows up on Rigsrevisionen's memorandum of 18 January 2011 to the Public Accounts Committee on the price, quality and access to treatment at private hospitals (mammography examinations). In the memorandum, the auditor general committed to launching a major examination of the quality of healthcare. It also appears from the memorandum that the auditor general intended to follow up on the efforts made by the Ministry of Health to implement registration and pro-active supervision of private providers of hospital services, etc. This aspect will be addressed in a separate memorandum.

3. The overall objective of the examination is to map the national quality programmes at the Danish hospitals and examine whether the national quality programmes contribute to ensuring and developing the quality of healthcare provided at the hospitals. The report answers the following questions:

- Are the national quality programmes and the efforts made by the hospital departments to ensure and develop the quality of healthcare connected?
- Are the national quality programmes supporting the hospital departments in their efforts to ensure and develop the quality of healthcare?
- Do the Ministry of Health and the regions follow up on the national quality programmes to determine whether they contribute to ensuring and developing the quality of healthcare?

The purpose of **quality assurance** is to ensure a certain standard of quality.

The purpose of **quality development** is to ensure systematic and focused improvement of the quality of the services provided by the healthcare system based on generally accepted knowledge.

Quality programmes are launched to ensure or develop quality and may be national, regional or local (limited to a specific hospital). Monitoring the occurrence of infections in patients after surgery is an example of a quality programme.

MAIN CONCLUSION

In recent years, the interest in ensuring and developing the quality of patient care has been on the increase. Rigsrevisionen welcomes this development towards consistent high quality healthcare to the benefit of the patients. Improving the quality at the hospitals may also improve the cost efficiency of the hospital system.

The monitoring of the development in the quality of healthcare must consider various interests, among these, development of treatments and management and political considerations. It is essential that the assessment of the different quality programmes includes assessment of the strain put on the hospital staff that follows from, for instance, the registration and documentation required in connection with the quality initiatives. Preserving the motivation of the hospital staff to develop the quality is crucial, as the staff is responsible for transforming the initiatives into quality when caring for the patients.

Rigsrevisionen recommends the Ministry of Health and the regions to continuously assess the appropriateness and organisation of the overall quality programmes at the hospitals. In continuation hereof the decision to strengthen the cooperation between the ministry and the regions on quality is considered well-founded by Rigsrevisionen.

The Danish Healthcare Quality Programme

This programme, which sets the accreditation standards for all Danish hospitals, is aiming to achieve:

- continuous development of quality;
- consistent high quality in all healthcare services;
- coherent patient pathways;
- transparency in healthcare.

The Danish Healthcare Quality Programme grew out of a collaboration between the government and the then counties.

The main conclusion is based on the following audit findings:

Are the national quality programmes and the efforts made by the hospital departments to ensure and develop the quality of healthcare connected?

Of the 17 national healthcare programmes identified by Rigsrevisionen, the Danish Healthcare Quality Programme is considered the most comprehensive. In addition hereto, the regions are to some extent implementing regional programmes. The quality programmes are implemented at the hospital departments as activities aiming to develop and ensure the quality of healthcare.

The Danish National Board of Health and the regions have in recent years managed to improve the connection between the various quality programmes. However, the aggregate number of programmes is considerable and the efforts to integrate the programmes should therefore be continued.

Are the national quality programmes supporting the hospital departments in their efforts to ensure and develop the quality of healthcare?

The examination showed that the national quality programmes support the hospital departments in their efforts to ensure and develop the quality of healthcare. As an example, the Danish Healthcare Quality Programme sets standards for the quality of patient care and thereby contributes to ensuring consistent treatment of the patients.

The examination also showed that the many quality programmes increase the need for prioritization of the activities at the hospital departments. The regions have pointed out that increased communication and openness between the management and staff concerning prioritisation of tasks may contribute to drawing attention to and eliminating disagreements and thereby underpin the prioritisation of activities.

According to the examination, an assessment of the contents and relevance of the individual programmes is also required. It should be taken into consideration that standards are set not only for processes and activities, but also for the quality of an individual healthcare service provided to a patient.

Lastly, the examination showed that the quality programmes would in some areas benefit from improved IT support, i.e. improved access to PCs and wireless networking. The regions are aware of this and are working towards a general improvement of IT support at the hospitals.

Do the Ministry of Health and the regions follow up on the national quality programmes to determine whether they contribute to ensuring and developing the quality of healthcare?

Generally, the Ministry of Health and the regions follow up on the implementation of the quality programmes, for which they are responsible. However, neither the ministry nor the regions have any overall knowledge of the amount of resources that are absorbed in the national programmes at the hospitals.

The Ministry of Health and the regions have followed up on most of the quality programmes to determine whether the planned outcomes have been achieved, or they are planning to do so. However, this is not the case for some of the national quality programmes and the ministry and the regions should therefore continue the efforts to strengthen their follow-up activities.

Rigsrevisionen is aware that it may be difficult to determine the outcome of the individual quality programmes, because many factors influence the development of quality for instance, the general development within health sciences and technology, which is usually not referred to as quality development, may have an impact on the results of treatments, patients' experiences, etc. In some areas, however, it will be possible to determine whether a specific programme has produced the intended outcome.

The Danish Healthcare Quality Programme is the most important quality programme in the healthcare sector. It provides a general framework for the establishment of a consistent high quality of healthcare at the hospitals, coherent patient pathways, etc. Rigsrevisionen considers it relevant for the Ministry of Health and the regions to assess whether the objectives of this programme are being achieved.