Chapter XXV
Goals and Benefits of Knowledge Management in Healthcare

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to explain the role of knowledge management and how it can be successfully applied in the area of healthcare in order to improve health services and to increase patients' satisfaction. The first part of this chapter is about explaining the theories beyond knowledge management as "what is knowledge" and how it can be transformed and captured across people and organizations. The second part consists of the theory of knowledge management and the benefits of it in the area of healthcare in comparison with the old traditional systems. Knowledge management systems can be used to index and at the same time to spread all that information across people, libraries, and hospitals.

INTRODUCTION

During the last 10 to 15 years, knowledge management (KM) has become more popular day by day. There is a lot of interest in the concept of capturing and sharing knowledge with technology as the enabler. This requires the existence of a knowledge-sharing culture. The KM system stores historical knowledge and knowledge created during exchanges of information among people who are interested in learning. Knowledge management allows everyone to reuse the knowledge (best practice) or to create new ideas (innovation).

According to Syed Sibte Raza Abidi (2001, p. 1), "Knowledge Management (KM) in healthcare can be regarded as the confluence of formal methodologies and techniques to facilitate the creation, identification, acquisition, development, preservation, dissemination and

finally the utilisation of the various facets of a healthcare enterprise's knowledge assets."

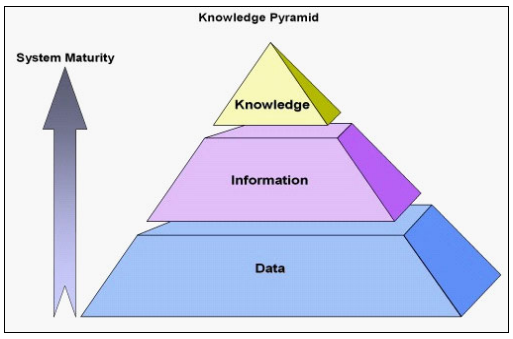
People in their everyday practice collect massive amounts of data and information that are knowledge poor, a fact that makes their decision about patients' cures more complicated. Knowledge in healthcare is deemed a high-value form of information that is necessary for healthcare professionals to act. For that matter, with the emergence of KM, the raw empirical data can be changed into empirical knowledge and provide professionals with a decision-support tool (Syed Sibte Raza Abidi, 2001).

KM in healthcare presents further interest for all those who are involved in the delivery of health services. KM allows rapid access to a knowledge treasure. The KM model goes beyond the need to manage data or information overload. It satisfies the requirements for implementing best practice and supplying high-quality health services, which increase patient satisfaction. The model aims at greater efficiency, coordination, and cost reduction. It is a portfolio of knowledge that increases ealth-care professionals' effectiveness and productivity. A KM system offers them the opportunity to learn how other colleagues successfully carried out similar problems (De Lusignan, Pritchard, & Chan, 2002).

WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE?

According to ITIL People (http://www.itilpeople.com/Glossary/Glossary_k.htm), "Knowledge is part of the hierarchy made up of data, information and knowledge. Data are raw facts. Information is data with context and perspective. Knowledge is information with guidance for action based upon insight and experience."

Figure 1. Knowledge pyramid (Marco, 2003)



Knowledge is very difficult to define; it is not just a simple document or something that someone told us. In order for a person to gain knowledge, there are three stages to progress through as the pyramid (see Figure 1) indicates. The actual content in each stage becomes smaller, starting with data and finishing with knowledge.

1. **Data:** Documents, unorganized and unprocessed (raw material)
2. **Information:** Selected data ➔ Interpretation of the data (processed data)
3. **Knowledge:** Selected information ➔ Interpretation of the information

Example: In order to complete an academic assignment, some steps need to be taken:

1. Research at libraries and on the Internet; Collect some documents ➔ Data
2. Interpretation of that data ➔ Information
3. Interpretation and evaluation of the information ➔ Knowledge

TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

Two types of knowledge exist in an organization.