

## **The value/benefits of COHSASA accreditation**

### **A quick summary of the benefits of healthcare facility accreditation<sup>i</sup>**

- Accreditation provides a framework to help create and implement systems and processes that improve operational effectiveness and advance positive health outcomes
- Improves communication and collaboration internally and with external stakeholders
- Strengthens interdisciplinary team effectiveness
- Demonstrates credibility and a commitment to quality and accountability
- Decreases liability costs; identifies areas for additional funding for health care organisations and provides a platform for negotiating this funding
- Mitigates the risk of adverse events
- Sustains improvements in quality and organisational performance
- Supports the efficient and effective use of resources in health care services
- Enables on-going self-analysis of performance in relation to standards
- Ensures an acceptable level of quality among health care providers
- Enhances the organisation's understanding of the continuum of care
- Improves the organisation's reputation among end-users and enhances their awareness and perception of quality care as well as their overall satisfaction level.
- Promotes capacity-building, professional development, and organisational learning
- Codifies policies and procedures
- Promotes the use of ethical frameworks
- Drives compliance with medication reconciliation
- Decreases variances in practice among health care providers and decision-makers
- Provides health care organisations with a well-defined vision for sustainable quality improvement initiatives
- Stimulates sustainable quality improvement efforts and continuously raises the bar with regard to quality improvement initiatives, policies, and processes
- Leads to the improvement of internal practices
- Increases health care organisations' compliance with quality and safety standards
- Enhances the reliability of laboratory testing
- Improves patients' health outcomes
- Provides a team-building opportunity for staff and improves their understanding of their co-workers' functions

- Promotes an understanding of how each person's job contributes to the health care organisation's mission and services
- Contributes to increased job satisfaction among physicians, nurses, and other Providers
- Engenders a spill-over effect, whereby the accreditation of one service helps to improve the performance of other service areas
- Highlights practices that are working well
- Promotes the sharing of policies, procedures, and best practices among health care organisations
- Promotes a quality and safety culture.

## **The Background**

The emergence of antibiotic-resistant super bugs and the increasing incidence of infections in healthcare facilities have thrown into sharp relief the often sub-standard and unhygienic practices prevalent in many hospitals, clinics and other institutions. Add to that the quadruple burden of disease across Africa and the well-known shortage of healthcare workers, and you have the perfect storm for compromised healthcare.

Although well established in Europe and the USA, the formal accreditation of healthcare facilities is, however, beginning to make a real difference in the quality of healthcare being practised in developing countries.

Accreditation is an internationally recognised evaluation process used to assess and improve the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of health care organisations. Simply put, accreditation is based on the premise that adherence to evidence-based standards will produce higher quality healthcare services in an increasingly safe environment. It is also a way to publically recognise that a healthcare organisation has met national quality standards (Pomey, 2005)<sup>ii</sup>.

It is only in the past decade or so that serious research on the value and benefits of accreditation has begun to systematically appear in peer review literature.

In a ground-breaking literature review conducted by A Alkhenizan and C Shaw in 2011, twenty-six studies evaluating the impact of accreditation were identified.<sup>iii</sup>

“The majority of the studies showed general accreditation for acute myocardial infarction (AMI), trauma, ambulatory surgical care, infection control and pain management; and subspecialty accreditation programmes to significantly improve the process of care provided by healthcare services by improving the structure and organisation of healthcare facilities. Several studies showed that general accreditation programmes significantly improve clinical outcomes and the quality of care of these clinical conditions and showed a significant positive impact of subspecialty accreditation programmes in improving clinical outcomes in different subspecialties, including sleep medicine, chest pain management and trauma management.

The authors concluded: *“There is consistent evidence that shows that accreditation programmes improve the process of care provided by healthcare services. There is considerable evidence to show that accreditation programmes improve clinical outcomes of a wide spectrum of clinical conditions. Accreditation programmes should be supported as a tool to improve the quality of healthcare services.”*

In the current era of heightened fiscal responsibility, transparency, accountability, and escalating health care complexity and risk, accreditation contributes to ensuring that care meets the highest standards of healthcare decision-making and provision. Accreditation can serve as a risk mitigation strategy, and it can also measure performance; it provides key stakeholders with an unbiased, objective, and third-party review. It can constitute a management tool for diagnosing strengths and areas for improvement... (Pomey, 2010).

Organisations that participate in accreditation confirm their commitment to quality improvement, risk mitigation, patient safety, improved efficiency, and accountability; it sends a powerful message to key decision-makers and the public. This performance measure contributes to the sustainability of the health care system. (Nicol, 2015)<sup>iv</sup>

The Council for Health Service Accreditation of Southern Africa (COHSASA), a not-for-profit NGO, has worked with the private and public health sectors since 1995 in 600 healthcare facilities to improve the quality of health care in many African countries. By harnessing national and international knowledge and experience, COHSASA recognises the standards that need to be adhered to and which systems need to be in place for healthcare institutions to provide the best and safest possible care to its patients.

COHSASA's authority to evaluate healthcare facilities has been internationally recognised. Its *Standards for Hospitals*, used to measure health facility performance, have been accredited four times (2002 – 2006, 2007 – 2011, 2012-2015 and from 2015 to 2018) by the International Society for Quality in Health Care (ISQua). This is a global body with over 70 member countries that drives continual improvement in the quality and safety of healthcare worldwide through education, research, collaboration and the sharing of evidence-based knowledge.

COHSASA has also been formally evaluated as an accrediting body since 2002 and recently re-accredited by ISQua for a fourth successive time until 2018. COHSASA is currently the only internationally accredited health care facility accreditation body in Africa.

## **The gathering evidence**

An increasing number of academic studies are showing clear benefits of accreditation and it is both a logical and safe assumption that when medical interventions are performed by competent individuals, using appropriate, regularly-serviced equipment in standard procedures regulated by written policies, risks are reduced and outcomes will be better.

Academic papers, particularly in the past decade, increasingly point to the indisputable benefits of accreditation.

Although couched in the language of continuous quality improvement, the accreditation process is, at its core, a risk reduction activity. It begins with the setting of contemporary standards that address important organisational functions – for example patient assessment, medication usage – and then encourages organisations, through the awarding of accreditation, to comply with these standards. The operating thesis is that if organisations are doing “right things right” as reflected in the standards, then errors and adverse outcomes are less likely to happen than if there were no such standards. Notwithstanding the continued high frequency of errors, this thesis is almost certainly correct<sup>v</sup>

The El-Jardali et al study on the impact of accreditation on primary health care<sup>vi</sup>, concluded, “This study demonstrated the positive impact of accreditation on PHC centers in several areas of quality and performance. Accreditation was associated with improved delivery of health care and quality.... Improvements in quality were reflected by the increase in customer satisfaction and number of patients visiting PHC centers from various regions and social strata.”

One of the constant narratives that COHSASA hears from its accredited clients is the following: the initial objection to quality improvement and accreditation interventions is the cost factor. However, the systems that are put in place ensure that wastage is reduced, that stocks are accounted for, that duplication is minimised and that the savings that result – not least from a reduced number of malpractice suits – outweigh the initial investment.

## **Web-based information system**

COHSASA uses a web-based information system – CoQIS (the COHSASA Quality Information System) to identify and keep track of improvements in all sections of a hospital or health facility. CoQIS can be used by hospital managers as a management tool to monitor the quality of their operations. It provides easy, user-friendly, continuous access to current hospital standards compliance, which enables management to make informed decisions as to when and where to introduce quality improvement programmes and prepare for accreditation.

Designated staff in facilities (and in corporate headquarters) access their own data via a secure password online and track improvements and obstacles to improvement *in situ*. They are able to examine all the areas of service provision and support in their hospitals or clinics and capture progress in compliance levels from the deepest level – criteria level – to the highest and broadest level – performance indicators in a single hospital, across several hospitals in a region, or in one country.

Senior management can use CoQIS to monitor each hospital performance routinely, while it prepares for accreditation, and monitor the quality of operations in all hospitals, singly or in groups, to ensure that the hospitals achieve and maintain quality standards in all services beyond accreditation. It is a tool for the ongoing monitoring of performance indicators.

CoQIS provides clear and unambiguous guidance to hospital managers and health policy strategists on what is wrong with hospitals, how deficiencies can be fixed and what is most important to fix first so that patients are safe and legal requirements are met. This means that endemic weaknesses in hospital service delivery can be picked up, monitored and improved.

For hospital insurance schemes, the knowledge that a facility has been accredited means that safer and better outcomes of patient care can be expected.

The value of entering a quality improvement programme – culminating in accreditation – is that information on deficiencies and common trends empower management to implement macro strategies to optimise the use of finance and resources.

## Uniform performance evaluation

There is value in a uniform performance evaluation because it informs budgeting and planning and identifies appropriate and cost-effective interventions. The addition of the internet-based CoQIS to the COHSASA portfolio means timesaving and reduced costs of transport and accommodation to gather information.

Healthcare facilities that carry a COHSASA Accreditation Certificate and have successfully completed the demanding requirements of the programme can offer patients peace of mind that they are receiving treatment in a facility that is safe, clean and meets definite safety and legal requirements. Patients can rely on the fact that there are clearly defined methods of interaction in the hospital that ensure their well-being, that there are systems to detect weaknesses and monitor improvements and sufficient, properly-trained staff to look after them.

There are some values attached to accreditation that cannot be quantified but only guessed at. Medical error, as the South African public sector – particularly – has been finding of late, carry a high financial cost. The proper systems required for compliance with standards of safety in both administrative and clinical operations in a healthcare facility means that accreditation may indirectly contribute towards preventing error. On that basis, the value of accreditation is incalculable.

COHSASA offers an adverse event reporting and monitoring system – PatSIS – which, combined with quality improvement and accreditation may prove to be a powerful set of tools to ensure that safe and better care is provided to patients. The reduction in costs associated with malpractice suits is therefore a given.

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<sup>i</sup> From The Value and Impact of Health Care Accreditation: A Literature Review Updated: April 2015 Wendy Nicklin; President & Chief Executive Officer. For access to this <https://accreditation.ca/sites/default/files/value-and-impact-en.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Marie-Pascale Pomey, MD, MSc, PhD (Department of Health Administration, Université de Montréal. Her research focuses on the evaluation of quality and safety programmes, and on the impact of accreditation systems on health institutions in terms of the dynamics of change and the implementation of continual quality and safety improvement programmes and patient involvement at the different level of the healthcare system. - See more at: <http://umanitoba.ca/outreach/evidencenetwork/marie-pascale-pomey#sthash.WcjEL74g.dpuf>

<sup>iii</sup> Impact of accreditation on the quality of healthcare services: a systematic review of the literature Alkhenizan A, Shaw C; Ann Saudi Med. 2011 Jul-Aug;31(4):407-16. doi: 10.4103/0256-4947.83204. Review.

<sup>iv</sup> The Value and Impact of Healthcare Accreditation; a literature review updated 2015, Wendy Nicklin, Accreditation Canada.

<sup>v</sup> Editorial in the BMJ; Accreditation's role in reducing medical errors by Dennis S O'Leary BMJ 2000; 320; 727-728 and referencing Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organisations: *The Measurement Mandate*. Oakbrook Terrace, Illinois: JCAHO, 1993.

<sup>vi</sup> Fadi El-Jardali *et al* "The impact of accreditation of primary healthcare centers: successes, challenges and policy implications as perceived by healthcare providers and directors in Lebanon", BMC Services Research 2014, 14:86 <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6963/14/86>