



Crisis Preparedness and Response in the Health System: The Role of Strategic Planning

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Dear Editor

To meet the health needs of the community, healthcare systems should involve various crucial resources, including humans, finance, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, information, and physical space (1). These resources are needed to balance the healthcare system, providing people with a continuum of health promotion, disease prevention, diagnosis and treatment, disease management, rehabilitation, and palliative care services based on people's living conditions (2). Also, appropriate management and leadership are other vital resources to provide quality, safe, and equal healthcare services (3). It is clear that strategic planning is one of the most crucial elements of healthcare management, and the importance of this subject becomes more considerable in crisis conditions, which involve the organization or even the whole society (4).

Therefore, it is better for societies to design scenario-based crisis management programs, which would be extremely beneficial for them to overcome the crisis faster with the lowest losses. This scenario-based planning should be given much more importance in countries where the population

density and poverty rate are higher, and they may not be sufficient in terms of the provision of quality and timely healthcare services. It seems that designing crisis management programs based on three scenarios, which are explained below, can be highly advantageous in paving the way for handling the crisis (Figure 1).

Scenario 1: In a crisis, all the resources of the healthcare system are used up, and there are no other resources to be allocated in order to overcome the critical health condition of the community. Although some of the main public services such as education and transportation may be disrupted following the crisis, attracting resources from various organizations is vital for the healthcare system. Since all resources are going to be used to manage the crisis, some healthcare services that seem to be less necessary will be temporarily ignored. For instance, the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic led to many health services being missed, such as prenatal care checkups, oral and dental care, and cancer screening (5). Additionally, drug and vaccine shortages are another challenge, which was seen in the recent pandemic for several

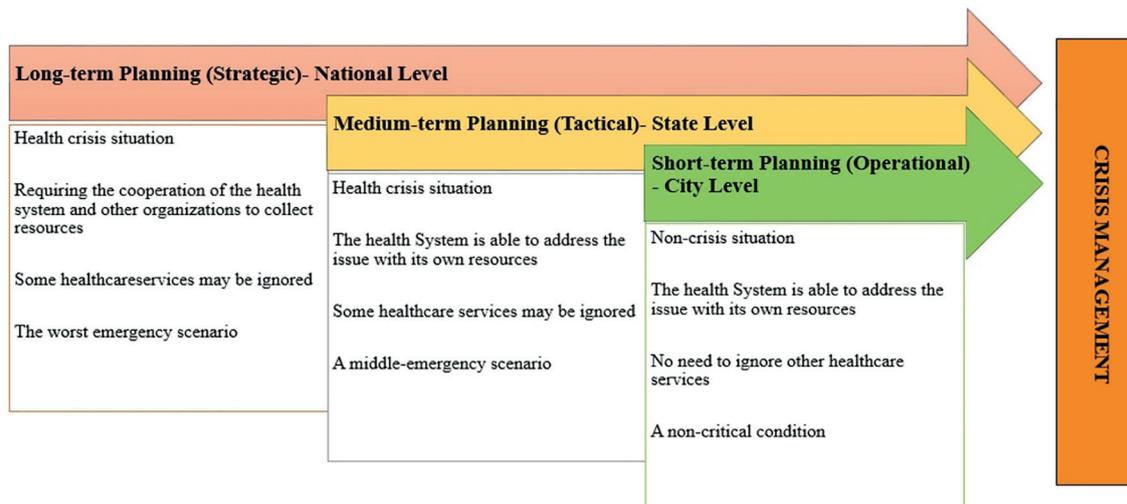


Figure 1: The summary of strategic planning for crisis management in the health system

reasons, such as inappropriate budget management and political issues. In this situation, appropriate strategic planning (for the next 5 to 20 years) can help countries forecast the different kinds of critical situations and design several steps to manage the condition.

Scenario 2: In a crisis, the health system itself can address the issue with its own resources and does not impose an additional burden on other organizations in the country. Since all resources are going to be used for managing the crisis, some healthcare services that seem to be less vital will be temporarily ignored and missed, which, of course, will have a number of health consequences. This situation requires tactical planning, which would be beneficial for health policymakers to obtain an appropriate outlook toward the possible crises in the near future (for the next 1 to 5 years) and design the measures that must be taken, leading to more successful crisis management.

Scenario 3: In a non-critical situation, the health system itself can address the issue with its own resources. Additionally, there is no need to ignore the other healthcare services to manage the situation. In this scenario, the system may be capable and have many resources to manage the condition, or the state is not as critical as the other scenarios, such as seasonal flu, in which an operational short-term plan (for up to one year) seems to be adequate to tackle the issue.

Conclusion

These three scenarios appear to be highly beneficial, especially for low- and middle-income countries where health system resources are limited and should be allocated more wisely.

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