A sustainable health system is a cornerstone of any developing society, ensuring the well-being of its citizens and fostering economic development and growth. Emerging healthcare sustainability involves multifaceted aspects of what constitutes a sustainable health system, addressing key components such as accessibility, affordability, quality of care, preventive measures, and the role of technology.

Leaders play a pivotal role in healthcare sustainability, yet their impact can be diluted. While some leaders champion innovative practices and resource optimisation, there is need to address systemic issues. Authentic and effective governance, adequate financial stewardship, and strategic foresight affect sustainable healthcare models. Leaders need to go beyond significant short-term gains, emphasising long-term ecological and economic viability. Collaboration, transparency, and a commitment to evidence-based policies are essential. Without visionary leadership, healthcare sustainability remains elusive and fragmented, perpetuating challenges that compromise the well-being of both the system and its beneficiaries. We have the systems that we have built and we will get the systems that we build.

A foundation of a sustainable health system involves universal accessibility. Access to healthcare should be equitable, ensuring that individuals, regardless of socioeconomic status, geographic location, or demographic characteristics, have the means to receive necessary health promotion and care. This involves creating a network of healthcare provision that spans urban and rural areas, reaching marginalised communities and underserved populations.

Affordability at system and individual levels involves economic balance. Financial barriers should not prevent individuals from seeking and receiving the care needed. A sustainable health system employs measures to reduce the economic burden on consumers, such as subsidised healthcare services, insurance coverage, and cost-effective pharmaceutical policies. It involves addressing the social determinants of health, recognising that factors like education, housing, and employment impact an individual’s or a family’s overall well-being.

Sustainability extends beyond accessibility and affordability to the quality of care provided. A robust health system emphasises evidence-based practices, continuous training for healthcare professionals, and the implementation of the latest medical technologies (technology seen in its broadest definition). Quality assurance mechanisms, such as accreditation programs and regular evaluation, are essential to maintain and improve standards, whilst a quality improvement agenda enables reflection and development. Patient-centred care, emphasising communication and shared decision-making, enhances the overall quality of healthcare services.

A sustainable health system is proactive, placing a strong emphasis on preventive measures to reduce the burden of illness. Contemporary health care needs concerted rebalancing between preventative and promotion activities with that of curative and rehabilitation. Public health initiatives, education campaigns, and vaccination programs are vital components of a comprehensive strategy. By promoting healthy behaviours and addressing risk factors, the health system can minimise the prevalence of diseases, leading to a healthier population and reducing demand on healthcare resources.

In the 21st century, technology plays a pivotal role in the sustainability of health systems. Technology in its broadest sense involves medication management, models of care, information and communications and biomedical
Development and application. Electronic health records, telemedicine, and health information systems optimise procedures, improve communication among healthcare professionals, enhance quality and safety as well as enabling the smooth interchange of information. Artificial intelligence and data analytics contribute to early diagnosis, personalised treatment plans, and the efficient allocation of resources. Integrating technology not only improves healthcare delivery but also fosters innovation and adaptability. These requiring a system that is open to innovation translation and change to face evolving health challenges.

Building a sustainable health system involves active community engagement. Communities should be involved in stewardship, decision-making processes, health promotion initiatives, and the design of healthcare services. Cultivating a sense of ownership and responsibility within communities enhances the effectiveness of health interventions and promotes a culture of health-conscious living.

In an interconnected world, the sustainability of health systems is an international concern. Collaboration among nations, international organisations, and non-governmental entities is crucial. Sharing best practices, pooling resources, and addressing global health threats collectively contribute to building resilient health systems that can withstand challenges such as pandemics and emerging infectious diseases. There is considerable earning from the COVID-19 pandemic related to technology and system management and the realisation of how different systems and actors addressed what are common community engagement issues.

Sustainable health systems are not universally identical but tailored to each country's unique values, needs, resources, and challenges. Cultural norms, economic conditions, as well as existing systems and infrastructure influence the design and effectiveness of healthcare models. Core principles like accessibility, affordability, and quality remain crucial but flexibility and adaptability are key to address diverse health landscapes. Global collaboration and shared knowledge can contribute to refining and enhancing individual nations' health systems, fostering a collective effort towards achieving sustainable and equitable healthcare on a global scale.

The work of the researchers and authors in this and all the editions of this journal contribute to that knowledge development and sharing of expertise.

Mark Avery  
Editor-in-Chief