

ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES OF IRAN HEALTH SYSTEM AFTER ISLAMIC REVOLUTION: STRUCTURAL REFORMS AT THE SECOND STEP

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The first 40 years of the Islamic revolution in Iran is called the first step of development. [1] Iran's health system has had significant success in providing universal health coverage at the primary health care level. [2] The development of the primary healthcare network especially, in rural and deprived areas is financed by public funds. The increase in the number of health facilities and health care providers per population, and simultaneously serving the role of education, research and healthcare service provision are the major achievements of the health system in Iran after the Islamic revolution. [2-4] Also, after Covid-19 outbreak, Iran had good progress in the human trial of homegrown COVID-19 vaccine. However, Iran's health financing system is still far from ideal. [5, 6]

The instability of financial resources and inappropriate payment mechanisms [5, 7, 8] remain major challenges of Iran's health system. Insufficient resources of insurance companies to reimburse healthcare providers [9, 10] and long-term delays in paying healthcare providers have led to dissatisfaction among providers and decline in quality of care as well as an increase in out-of-pocket payments and household exposure to catastrophic health expenditures. Unfortunately, the accumulated debt of insurance companies to medical centres has led to a crisis in terms of provision of hospital services, distribution of medicines in pharmacies, and sale of medical equipment. [11] On the other hand it seems, due to COVID-19 crisis, Iran's hospitals - as a heart of health services providing system - are faced with an irreversible economic shock. [12]

Iran's health care system challenges stem from not only the lack of resources but also is largely due to inappropriate

health policymaking and macro-level health decisions. A sharp increase in medical tariffs (up to 400%), the development of health insurance coverage through unstable sources, and not paying enough attention to risk pooling and risk-sharing mechanisms in the health system are some of the most important adverse effects of last health reforms on Iran health system [13-15]. On the other hand, there was not enough attention to address the main structural weaknesses of the health system including the implementation of a coherent referral system, family physician program and electronic health record (EHR). [9, 16] In this situation, health insurance companies cannot afford to pay for the inefficiency costs of the health system in Iran. [11]

In the current situation of structural weakness, despite providing new financial resources, the challenges in health financing systems remained. The health system in Iran requires a fundamental reform of its structure and process. If these changes are not made, the health system financing problems will not be solved, and the mere injection of new financial resources will not be a good solution to the problem in the long-term. Coherent policies should be pursued and implemented to organize the structure of the health system in Iran. At the first step, it is recommended that sustainable resources be allocated to the implementation and development of structural reforms including referral system, family physician, EHR and private health insurance coverage. These reforms should take into account the experience of the country and the success of other countries in creating an effective system of universal health coverage. Hence, the health reforms in terms of

structure and process could be the linchpin of the health system in the second step of the Iran Islamic revolution.

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