

Improving the assessment of the performance of health systems in times of crisis

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Background

Crises, such as environmental, financial, social, or health-related events, can severely disrupt health systems, impacting routine medical and public health services. The COVID-19 pandemic in Switzerland exemplified such a crisis, significantly challenging the Swiss health system with increased deaths, reduced hospital admissions, and intensified demands on intensive care. Assessing health system performance during crises is crucial but lacks a universally accepted method.

Analysis

One of the main tools currently used to assess the performance of a health system is the Health System Performance Assessment (HSPA) proposed by the WHO in 2012. It was recently updated for using it in times of crisis by including the notion of resilience. However, this kind of framework and new vision of integrating performance and resilience jointly are newly emerging and not widely used yet. The assessment of the Swiss health system performance in times of crisis appeared not to be up to date with new developments and needs special attention to be developed within the context of a time of crisis.

Policy options

Our first recommendation is to consider resilience as an inherent notion of health system performance assessment to make it useful in times of crisis. The second one is to adopt a standardized health system performance and resilience framework that is useful in times of crisis. The third one is to consider resilience indicators when assessing the health system performance in times of crisis. The final one is to facilitate health-related data collection and sharing.

Conclusion

Integrating resilience into the assessment of Switzerland's health system performance provides a clearer picture of its ability to absorb, adapt and learn from crises. This approach is essential for guiding practical actions and ensuring long-term health system sustainability in Switzerland.