

From Hospital to Home: Service and Systems thinking for effective, efficient and sustainable healthcare

< Service systems and systems thinking / The Viable Systems Approach (VSA)>

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – In the context of healthcare, especially because of the aging population, the number of patients with chronic illness is growing determining an increase in the need for daily and long-term assistance and a shift from hospital to local and home care. To address this need, it is relevant the capability of providing effective care by appropriately integrating social and health services. Accordingly, by adopting a service and systems view, this study aims to investigate how the conditions for effective, efficient, and sustainable healthcare change when shifting service from hospital to local and home care.

Design/Methodology/approach – The paper starts with a literature overview aimed to explore the contribution of service and systems thinking to the modeling of effective, efficient, and sustainable healthcare. Then, in the light of the most relevant literature contributions, the main approaches to healthcare currently adopted in Italy are analyzed. Examples cases of the Regions' management of the COVID-19 pandemic are selected to identify elements useful to address the research question.

Findings – The study carries out an analysis of dominant approaches to healthcare in Italy in which the main elements of variety in play are discussed in the light of a service and systems thinking view. A framework of synthesis is outlined to compare hospital, local, and home care in terms of conditions for effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of service. The main interpretative hypothesis highlights the advantages as well as the criticalities of shifting from hospital to local to home care as a possible strategy for increasing the overall effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of healthcare service.

Research limitations/implications – The paper represents a standpoint of a study that will need further work to verify the arising interpretative hypothesis based on the theoretical and conceptual contribution of service and systems thinking.

Practical implications – The study provides a theoretical contribution to the modeling of healthcare indicating how the conditions of effective, efficient, and sustainable service can practically change when shifting from hospital to local and home care.

Originality/value – The paper provides elements for analyzing the conditions for shifting from hospital to local and home care appropriately integrating social and health services into the delivery system in order to increase the overall effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of healthcare.

Key words – Healthcare; Hospital care; Local care; Home Care; Systems Thinking, Service logic; Effectiveness; Efficiency; Sustainability; COVID-19 Pandemic.

Paper type – Conceptual/Research paper

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