

Improving Knowledge Management Practices in the South African Healthcare System

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Abstract : Knowledge is increasingly recognised in this, the knowledge era, as a strategic resource, by public sector organisations, in view of the public sector reform initiatives. People and knowledge play a vital role in attaining improved organisational performance and high service quality. Many government departments in the public sector have started to realise the importance of knowledge management in streamlining their operations and processes. This study focused on knowledge management in the public healthcare service organisations, where the concept of service provider competitiveness pales to insignificance, considering the huge challenges emanating from the healthcare and public sector reforms. Many government departments are faced with challenges of improving organisational performance and service delivery, improving accountability, making informed decisions, capturing the knowledge of the aging workforce, and enhancing partnerships with stakeholders. The purpose of this paper is to examine the knowledge management practices of the Gauteng Department of Health in South Africa, in order to understand how knowledge management practices influence improvement in organisational performance and healthcare service delivery. This issue is explored through a review of literature on dominant views on knowledge management and healthcare service delivery, as well as results of interviews with, and questionnaire responses from, the general staff of the Gauteng Department of Health. Web-based questionnaires, face-to-face interviews and organisational documents were used to collect data. The data were analysed using both the quantitative and qualitative methods. The central question investigated was: To what extent can the conditions required for successful knowledge management be observed, in order to improve organisational performance and healthcare service delivery in the Gauteng Department of Health. The findings showed that the elements of knowledge management capabilities investigated in this study, namely knowledge creation, knowledge sharing and knowledge application, have a positive, significant relationship with all measures of organisational performance and healthcare service delivery. These findings thus indicate that by employing knowledge management principles, the Gauteng Department of Health could improve its ability to achieve its operational goals and objectives, and solve organisational and healthcare challenges, thereby improving organisational.

Keywords : knowledge management, Healthcare Service Delivery, public healthcare, public sector

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