

Meaning and Evolution of Protocols in Healthcare Management and their Effect on The Quality of Patients Healthcare with Reference to National Accreditation in Particular NABH

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Abstract-- Healthcare protocols are essential for ensuring standardized, safe, efficient, and patient-centred care. The aim of this article is to examine the meaning, evolution, implementation, and impact of Healthcare Protocol Management, with particular reference to National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH) Standards in India. This is an exploratory approach based primarily on secondary data, including healthcare guidelines, accreditation standards, professional practices, case-based observations, and relevant legal considerations. Healthcare Protocols plays an important role in Clinical Governance, Infection Prevention and Control, Patient Safety, Emergency Preparedness, Medical Records Management, Pharmacy and Laboratory Services, Surgical and Critical Care, Patient Privacy, Informed Consent, Staff Training and Continuous Quality Improvement. properly designed and consistently implemented protocols can reduce variations in clinical decision-making, prevent avoidable errors, improve treatment coordination, minimize unnecessary investigations and delays, and strengthen accountability among Healthcare Professionals and Institutions. Protocol-based care also promotes regular auditing, feedback, performance assessment, and evidence-based improvement. However, excessive standardization may restrict professional judgment if protocols are applied without considering individual patient needs. Effective implementation therefore requires adequate infrastructure, trained personnel, periodic review, technological support, patient participation, and flexibility for appropriate clinical modifications. To conclude Healthcare Protocol Management, when aligned with NABH standards and supported by patient-centred practices, can significantly improve the quality, safety, transparency, and legal accountability of healthcare delivery in India.

Keywords-- Healthcare Protocol Management, Patient-centered Approach, National Accreditation Board of Healthcare, Patient safety, Human Resource Management, Clinical safety, Critical Care Management, Laboratory Services, Medical Records Management.

Aim And Objective-- The aim of this article is to examine the meaning, evolution, implementation, and impact of Healthcare Protocol Management, with particular reference to National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH) Standards in India.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Government of India and the Indian Medical Association, NABH standards require,

“Hospitals to implement clinical guidelines, conduct regular peer reviews and maintain clinical audit program”.

This kind of framework promotes, *“Accountability and continuous improvement in clinical services”.*

NABH Accreditation signifies that, *“a hospital needs established Healthcare Standards. It assures patients receive high Quality Care, Safety and Effective Management. Accreditation of hospitals by NABH will enhance their credibility of any Healthcare Facility.”*

The importance of NABH Accreditation in India,

1. Enhances patient safety and care quality
2. Boosts hospital reputation and trust
3. Promotes continuous improvement
4. Facilitates Medical Tourism
5. Ensures Legal and Regulatory compliance
6. Accreditation by NABH in India is almost equivalent to JCI (Joint Commission International) in USA, and covers various aspects of *“hospital management and patient care and includes patients rights and education, infection control, patient safety, continuous quality improvement and facility management.”*

The following are the essential rules for compliance of NABH by Healthcare facilities.

1. Patients right and education: This includes *“providing education about their condition and treatment options, empowers patients to make informed decisions.”*

2. Infection control: It is mandatory for NABH Accredited Healthcare Facilities, strictly follow the protocols such as infection prevention, including hand hygiene, sterilized equipment and isolation procedures for infectious patients, compliance of these guidelines minimize the risk of healthcare facility acquired infections.

3. *The other important protocol to get an NABH Accreditation is Patient Safety* – Healthcare facilities must implement systems to prevent medical errors, such as medication administration errors on surgical complications. In addition regular staff training, safety checklist and instant reporting mechanism are essential for patient safety program.

4. *Continuous Quality Improvement:* In the healthcare facility protocol continuous quality improvement is a dynamic process that involves **“regulatory assessing and enhancing hospital practices. NABH rules for hospitals emphasize the importance of CQI through regular audits, a reliable feedback system and performance matrix. An healthcare that embraces CQI demonstrates a commitment to excellence and adaptability.”**

5. *Facility Management and Safety:* Proper facility management ensures that healthcare facility infrastructure supports safe and efficient operations which eventually helps in improving the ROI of healthcare facility management. NABH guidelines include standards for building maintenance, fire safety and waste management that includes health hazardous waste.

6. *Medical Records Management:* Another important aspect of protocol of healthcare facility is **“accurate and accessible medical records are vital for effective patient care. NABH rules for healthcare facilities require meticulous documentation of patient information, treatment plans and outcomes”**. The present new system of digital records encourages every healthcare facility enhance data accuracy and security.

7. *Emergency preparedness:* Healthcare facility must be prepared to handle emergencies including natural disasters and mass casualty incidents. NABH standards mandate comprehensive emergency preparedness plans, regular drills and coordination with local emergency services. This ensures that healthcare facilities can respond swiftly and effectively in crisis.

8. *Human Resources Management:* The other important aspect NABH regulations include, **“Skilled and well trained workforce is essential for delivering high quality healthcare. NABH rules for healthcare facilities include guidelines for staff recruitment, training and performance evaluation. In addition healthcare facility management should ensure that staff members are competent and continuously improving their skills is necessary in maintaining excellence.”**

9. *Clinical Governance:* This encompasses **“the policies and practices that ensure high standards of clinical care.**

NABH standards require healthcare facilities to implement clinical guidelines, conduct regular peer reviews and maintain Clinical Audit Programs. This promotes a framework for the healthcare facility for accountability and continuous improvement in Clinical Services.”

10. *Pharmacy Services:* Any healthcare facility who maintains pharmacy services as an integral part is nothing but patients care. NABH rules for healthcare facilities stipulate the management of medication, storage, dispensing and administration. The Pharmacists who are employed in pharmacy section must work closely with medical staff to ensure the correct and safe use of medications.

11. *Patient satisfaction and feedback:* Finally this kind of **“Patient Satisfaction and Feedback”** is a valuable tool for improving healthcare facility services, and thus NABH standards encourage facilities to collect and analyze patient satisfaction data regularly. This kind of addressing patient’s concerns (problems) and making necessary improvements based on feedback and suggestions demonstrates a patient centered approach to care.

12. *Nutritional And Dietary Services:* For any inpatient in healthcare facility proper nutritional and diet is a critical aspect for the patient’s fast recovery. In this aspect NABH rules provide for healthcare facilities, guidelines for dietary services, ensuring that patient’s receive nutritious and appropriate meals. In addition dietary staff must collaborate with clinical teams to address the specific nutritional needs of each patient in accordance with the advice given by the nutritionist.

13. *A non procedural and important aspect is Housekeeping and Sanitation:* Sanitation and Hygiene are critically important for preventing infections and ensuring patient comfort. NABH standards makes it mandatory and rigorous with respect to housekeeping protocols including regular cleaning schedules and disposal of waste including hazardous material.

14. *Medical Equipment Management:* Another important aspect that comes under healthcare facility protocol is **“Medical Equipment Management”** that includes proper management of medical equipments’ are vital for delivering effective Healthcare and NABH rules provide and makes it mandatory for Healthcare Facilities, **“regular maintenance, calibration and testing of medical devices. Ensuring that medical equipment that are being frequently used are in optimal working condition preventing malfunctions to improve patient safety”**.

15. *Laboratory Services*: Another important aspect in Non-procedural healthcare protocol in a facility is accurate and timely laboratory services are crucial for diagnosis and treatment; else diagnostic errors may crop-in that makes patient safety in Doldrums providing high standards in Diagnostic Testing Laboratories in any Healthcare Facility contribute to accurately diagnosis so as to give effective treatment/procedure planning.

16. The other important aspect of healthcare facility with the invention of **Radiology and Imaging Services** that are playing vital role in patient care and diagnosis; In this aspect NABH rules for healthcare facilities *“outline standards for the safe and effective use of imaging equipment that includes protocols for radiation safety, staff qualifications and maintenance of regular equipment maintenance.”*

17. *Procedural (Surgical Services)*: Safe and efficient procedural services are a corner stone of healthcare facilities and in this regard, NABH standards cover all aspects of Procedural (Surgical Care), from Pre-Operative (Pre-Procedural) assessments to Post-Operative (after procedure) Care. Healthcare facilities who are adhering these guidelines can give maximum safety to patients and optimal procedural (surgical) outcomes. This is why in any Healthcare Facility it is divided into Pre-Procedural, Peri-Procedural, Procedural, Post-Procedural.

18. *Critical Care Services*: Critical care services are essential in any healthcare facility that runs on 24/7 because *“for managing severe ill patients”*. NABH standard rules in this regard for healthcare facilities include *“standard for ICU equipment, staffing, management of ICUs, providing high quality critical care, multidisciplinary approach”*, are essential in addition Human Touch and Human Care.

19. *Rehabilitation Services*: Another important aspect in healthcare facility protocols that requires post procedural action under the supervision of therapist, NABH established some standards for all the facilities who are having the registration of NABH. Some guidelines for *“Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy”*.

20. *Ambulance Services*: The other important aspect for any healthcare facility that runs on 24/7 to maintain efficient ambulance services for emergency response and transportation of the critical ill patients to facility from their homes. In this regard, NABH provides rules for healthcare facility that includes *“standards for ambulance staffing, equipment and response times”*.

Ensuring that ambulance services meet the standards is crucial for patient safety during transport. The best example is recently some hospitals who are doing transplantation of Kidneys, Lungs and Hearts to transport the items from donor to recipient who are separated by large distance are in conveyance with state government, police and other departments with the healthcare facility to provide *“Green Corridor”*, a safe and immediate transportation of organs from one place to other even at the distance of 2000 kms.

21. The other important aspect of Protocol in Healthcare Facility is **Patient Privacy and Confidentiality**. According to NABH standards that requires any healthcare facility to register themselves with NABH should maintain patients privacy and confidentiality is an ethical obligation. In addition the NABH rules require storage of Medical Records and ensuring that only authorized personnel have access to sensitive information.

22. *Ethical Practices*: In a country like India where number of religious practices and beliefs are in force maintaining the protocol of ethical practice so that not to disturb the religious feelings of any community and to get patient trust and high quality care. NABH rules for healthcare facilities include, *“Guidelines for Ethical Conduct, Informed Consent and Patient Advocacy”*.

23. The protocol is not end with the **Patient and Healthcare Facility and the Staff and Healthcare Professionals but also with Community**. In this regard, Government of India made amendment in Corporate rules u/s 135 of the Act, to make it mandatory for all the Organizations especially Healthcare Facilities to contribute part of their earnings for Corporate Social Responsibility for which they should form an independent establishment under the supervision of a Director and including local Social Services Experts who are willing to join and the healthcare facilities to prepare yearly programs that are useful for local Healthcare Community to enhance Healthcare Standards by educating them for which NABH established certain rules for Healthcare Facilities that includes Energy Efficiency, Waste Reduction and Sustainable Procurement.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

While discussing about Protocols Services that are to be complied in NABH Accredited Hospitals/Healthcare Facilities let us examine what is Accreditation? And its pros and cons and the Protocols that have to be strictly observed in NABH Healthcare Facilities.

Accreditation is considered to be an effective system of Healthcare Professionals and facilities and Accreditation by International Accreditation Agencies like JCI are also effective in Indian Accreditation Agency of which the Prime Organization NABH (National Accreditation Board of Hospitals). Any Healthcare Facility which is recognized by NABH have to strictly follow Healthcare Protocols that are defined by the Indian Medical Council in accordance with established healthcare laws in India that includes Fundamental Rights of any Citizen with respect to Healthcare failing which how the Indian Medical Council will react to the situation either by canceling NABH nor violating the rules and regulations, nor undermining the rights of the patients and responsibilities of healthcare providers are at least by imposing heavy fines with a letter of warning initially. After the opening of economy bringing in healthcare facilities/services will be made open to the private because healthcare to the entire nation is not possible only by the government. Hence, a decade or so back Government of India liberalized the rules and regulations and offering incentives to the organizations to invest in Healthcare Facilities in Private Sector but under the control and guidance of Indian Laws. This kind of Facility enabled many Private Entrepreneurs and Organizations to step into the arena of Healthcare either by themselves or joint ventures with Foreign Healthcare Facilities or bringing in the advanced Technology in Healthcare. Today Healthcare in private sector has become one of the most rewarded sectors and took second position in earning foreign exchange to the government through Medical Tourism promotion. Now the present position of Healthcare Sector in India is none to less than an advanced country where more sophisticated technology is introduced and the same can be available and affordable in India with 1/3rd of the cost with equal expertise. This kind of health revolution in Private Sector has brought in specialty and Super Specialty Healthcare Facilities throughout the country and offering the latest Healthcare Facilities clubbed with technology as that is available in advanced countries. In this regard to provide a guarantee of quality of Healthcare Services especially keeping in view the International Patients that are looking forward to India because, ***a. cost consideration, b. availability of latest technology, c. availability of equally qualified healthcare professionals and in addition to have their sojourn after procedures are plenty in.***

To define an Accreditation (National and International) is,

“A self assessment and external peer assessment process used by healthcare organizations to accurately assess their level of performance in relation to established standards and to implement ways to continuously improve.”

Accreditation whether it is National or International is not mere recognition but it is a long drawn procedure which surveyors' survey by selecting patients at random and also through the Medical Records as a road map as standards of compliance. Healthcare Facility Standards are organized based on the important functions common to all Healthcare Organizations. The functional organizations of standards are now the most widely used in the world and are validated by scientific study, testing and application; of these healthcare protocol is one such function because to meet the demands, aspirations and wishes of the international patients every healthcare facility with Accreditation of International and National (JCI & NABH) have to strictly follow healthcare protocols that are standardized by International Health Organizations and Healthcare Organizations of each Country so that the safety and satisfactions of the patients can be met.

NABH standards and rules for healthcare facilities and the essential guidelines, protocols and policies are made available because ***“healthcare facilities provide top-notch healthcare services for maintaining the highest safety and quality standards; understanding and adhering to these rules is crucial for achieving these goals”***. That is why in India, NABH and healthcare providers, sets stringent guidelines to ensure that healthcare facilities offer the best care. These guidelines that are established by NABH by healthcare facilities help the facilities to navigate compliance and excel in their services.

Some of the important aspects dwelt by NABH are, a. Patient safety, b. continuous quality improvement, c. facility management and safety, d. medical records management, e. emergency preparations, f. human resource management, g. clinical governance, h. pharmacy services, i. patients services and feedbacks, j. nutritional and dietary services, k. housekeeping and sanitation, l. medical equipment management, m. laboratory services, n. radiology and imaging services, o. critical care services, p. rehabilitation services, q. ambulance services, r. patient privacy and confidentiality, s. ethical practices, t. community engagement, u. environment sustainability, v. surgical care services etc., all these have their own Healthcare Protocols and have to be followed strictly by NABH/JCI accredited facilities failing which their accreditation will be canceled and imposed huge fine and at times even cancel the license.



Hence it is obligatory on the part of the Healthcare Facilities/Providers in addition to following NABH rules and regulations they should strictly adhere to the Healthcare Protocols.

III. DISCUSSIONS AND ANALYSIS

The idea behind healthcare protocol maintaining healthcare protocols is ***“to ensure that patients (inpatients and outpatients) get good care and that healthcare management practices work in accordance with International Standards”***. It is necessary and important for Healthcare Professionals in any Healthcare Facility to use/apply organized procedures because more and more patients want fast Healthcare Delivery System.

Healthcare Management Protocol are nothing but standard models that make sure that best care is given with consistency to all the patients in each and every healthcare situation (Emergency, Non emergency). Healthcare protocols describe a detailed instructions and procedures on how to diagnose, treat and care for patients. In addition, Healthcare Protocol defines in organized way to provide healthcare that helps cut down on variations and mistakes in professional decision making by the Healthcare Professionals. This will minimize, if not eliminated the litigations of the patients and their accomplice to stay in Healthcare Facility more than what is required, in addition to get unnecessary procedures and diagnostic tests and medication if the Healthcare Professionals follow the protocols that is defined for each case (ailment/disease/discomfort), unnecessary medication, wrong diagnosis, medical negligence etc. If the healthcare protocols are well organized, trained and implemented, it will reduce the cost of procedures, save the time of time and money of the patients and experts services can be brought to a minimum so that more number of patients can be benefited by those experts. In Healthcare Protocols that are defined for each and every ailment/discomfort are provided with a detailed instructions on how to diagnose, treat and care for patients. These Healthcare Protocols also provide in organized way to provide care that helps cut down on variations and mistakes in professional decision making. These Healthcare Protocols are mainly useful in healthcare emergencies, accidents and burn injuries etc. where time is precious and the patient has to be treated immediately with minimum loss of time failing which the process will become futile. Healthcare protocols also help the healthcare professionals/experts giving them a clear guidance and direction for each step of care so that the improvement rate gets improved.

However in addition to the plus points there are certain negative aspects in healthcare protocols such as, ***“how well the work rests on how well healthcare workers accept them, how well they are trained and how well healthcare facilities can change the standards to meet the needs of individual Patients”***. Hence it is obligatory on the part of healthcare facilities and providers and professionals needs a constant review to make sure that the present healthcare protocols that are in use are still useful and in line with the new technologies and healthcare procedures that often changes the healthcare procedures, such as Minimum Invasive Surgery (Mis), Robotic Surgery and such other advanced technologies that make the procedures safe and with minimum loss of time and patients sufferings.

However, by adopting healthcare protocols in line with NABH rules and regulations one should not forget ***“quality of care for patients is a key part of figuring out how well a healthcare protocol system works generally and make sure that people will have good healthcare results, when get high quality care, the services received/provided are safe, effective, patient centered, on time, quick and fair.”*** These qualities that are mentioned above are to be kept in mind while preparing healthcare protocols because quality is utmost important, next comes safety and unwanted stay in the healthcare facilities by the patients.

IV. CONCLUSION

One of the important aspects in judging healthcare protocol management practices is ***“how standardized and consistent they are when used in different healthcare situations”***. In Healthcare Protocol System Standards, standardization make sure that all patients get the same amount of care and how best that protocol suits to the patient in that particular situation. When this type of protocol systems are developed for each and every disease healthcare professionals decision making will be easier, more accurate and less time consuming. In addition if any untoward incident happens, the healthcare professional cannot be punished and will have an answer to explain how in a given situation, he adopted the protocol that is accepted by Healthcare International and National Organizations. The other important aspect is Healthcare Professionals when following the Healthcare Protocols in accordance with NABH rules and regulations can reduce the chance of mistakes and accelerate the treatment procedures and that the solutions that are adopted or well thought-out and based on facts.

When the feedback system is introduced and properly maintained will keep an eye on the protocols not only by the providers but also on Healthcare Professionals, how frequently doctors and nurses observe set policies for evaluation, treatment and comply with-up care. In addition, this practice will discover locations where rules are frequently left out are misunderstood by surveying or auditing Healthcare Practices. Electronic Health Records and Clinical decision support system also allow Healthcare Institutions keep a watch on how Protocols are being observed. By doing so and making it a practice one can find, any changes from the present Protocol System that is in use as it may be eliminated/modified/reoriented. Standardization and stability are very critical for making sure that the benefits of Healthcare Protocol Management practices will yield good results. Another important aspect in Healthcare Protocol Management System is how well patient-centered care is integrated with healthcare management practices. To implement any standard healthcare protocol, the responsibilities of healthcare providers lies, *"to give healthcare professionals and para medical staff, the tools and instructions they need to take a patient's wish into account when deciding how to treat them; because healthcare protocol is a general guidelines for every disease but in a given situation, in a given patient's particular health condition there may be adjustments and changes in healthcare protocols for which the healthcare professionals and healthcare staff are given room."* The other important aspect that already discussed is feedback from patients, is also an important part of reviewing patient-centered care and can find out how well healthcare workers are following Patient-Centered Healthcare Protocols within the frameworks and guidelines of NABH by survey, interviewing the patients and the accomplice or holding focus groups with patients is also necessary that simply making surveys are not enough but they should examine *"how often patients feel like their wishes are taken into account and how well do healthcare workers talk to them"*.

The main goal of healthcare management guidelines in accordance with NABH guidelines and healthcare protocol system that is prevalent in healthcare facility, it is necessary on the part of the healthcare providers/management, *"how well these methods are working/implemented and how they reach the goals"*. One way to achieve these things are one has to look at many different parts of the health of patients, such as their clinical results, healing rates, happiness and general well-being. Healthcare protocols are effective if they improve patient's health in a measured way and cut down on problems, re admissions and treatment delays.

In addition, Healthcare Protocols will reduce healthcare errors and improve safety to the patients. One of the many reasons why mistakes happen in healthcare is that there are not any standardized methods or rules for how to give care. On the other hand healthcare protocol and NABH rules and regulations in line with healthcare protocols will provide healthcare professionals *"clear, backed by evidence, instructions that make sure that the best decisions are always made and that best healthcare practices are always followed"*.

By observing Healthcare Protocols, Healthcare Professionals can make sure that, *"the best decisions are always made and that best practices are always followed and professional practices are more consistent."* Guidelines either NABH or protocol systems help stop Healthcare Professionals from deviating from approved procedures, plans when there is no necessity, *"for instance procedures for giving medicines, make sure that right medicine is given at the appropriate time in an appropriate dose and in doing so medication care is given (healthcare protocol); this lowers the chances of medication mistakes, in surgery settings, safety rules like time-out, methods, to make sure that right patient is having the right procedure at the right time with a right healthcare professional team. This kind of healthcare protocols and guidelines will reduce the mistakes to the extent possible during procedures and help patients to come out from the procedural anemia fast"*.

Healthcare protocols helps Healthcare Professionals and Paramedics Stop Bad Things From Happening By Telling healthcare professionals what to do in different situations like dealing with problems or urgent conditions (accidents and burn injuries). Healthcare Protocols and guidelines when in use hand in glove to tackle urgent conditions during procedures. However, there are certain elements that are not helpful to follow Healthcare Protocol Management System fully such as technical and infrastructural issues define major challenges in implementing Healthcare Management strategies because healthcare is attracting latest innovations, technology improvement, and introduction of machine handling systems, reducing the efficiency of Healthcare Professionals are some of the barriers. In these things the important aspect is introduction of technology and advancements thereon will reduce human decision making system thereby, there is possibility of making mistakes because the machines like robotic surgery etc. will go in a defined path, on the other hand an healthcare professional when dealing in situation can have on hand advantage of going in accordance with situation.



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