



The spoken word applies

Wennberg International Collaborative

Spring Policy Meeting

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Opening session 09:00–10:30 (10 min.)

Ladies and gentlemen,
delegates from Switzerland and abroad,
researchers and early-career researchers,

I'm delighted to welcome you all – also on behalf of
the federal authorities – to this conference.

1. Regional variation in healthcare

To explore the topic of regional variation in
healthcare, you've certainly come to the right place:
Switzerland is a country with 26 cantons with
26 different health systems and, in addition, four
different language regions, which also differ
culturally.

In other words, in this country, regional variation is the rule, not the exception.

This reflects our democratic and federalist system. But at the same time, under the Federal Constitution (Art. 43a para. 4), we are required to ensure that basic health services are made available to everyone in a comparable way.

This is a challenge – and in order to meet it, we also rely on contributions from health services research.

2. Health policy in Switzerland

Switzerland today has an excellent health system. The public is satisfied with the services provided. This is confirmed, for example, by the Commonwealth Fund's International Health Policy Survey, in which Switzerland also participated: 84 per cent of respondents aged over 65 said that they were completely or very satisfied with the quality of healthcare received during the past 12 months.

However, on the other hand:

Our health system is expensive.

It is characterised by a high degree of complexity.

Health policy is shaped by a large number of – often conflicting – interests.

As I have already mentioned, responsibilities for control and enforcement are divided between the federal and cantonal authorities. In a few key areas – such as financing, healthcare provision and education – the responsibilities are shared. In some respects, the federal and cantonal players are pulling in the same direction, but in others they have different ideas. These differences have to be tolerated in a federalist state.

In 2013, with the aim of enabling Switzerland's health system to address these (and other) challenges, while at the same time keeping it affordable, the Federal Council adopted the "Health2020" strategy. In this overview, the priorities for Swiss health policy are defined in four areas – "quality of life", "equality of opportunity", "quality of healthcare provision" and "transparency". The report includes 36 measures which are to be implemented step by step.

3. Incentives for smarter healthcare

These measures should of course also help to ensure *smarter healthcare*.

For us, however, the focus is not just on technology, but in particular on the quality of care provided for the public.

In addition, these measures are designed to control health system costs. We are convinced that good quality can have positive effects on the development of costs: ineffective or unnecessary services, and undesirable complications, can be avoided.

So how do we implement smarter healthcare?

Here, two measures included in the “Health2020” strategy are crucially important:

The first step, for us, involves improving the coordination of healthcare provision. We want to achieve this by strengthening collaboration among health professionals. Our goal is to promote interprofessional care teams in primary care.

Secondly, we want to increase the use of eHealth. The adoption of eHealth tools can support and facilitate the cooperation of all actors involved in the treatment process. The key measures in this area are:

- the introduction and active promotion of electronic patient records,
- the introduction and active promotion of eMedication,
- and digital support for treatment processes, for example on discharge from hospital.

We are convinced that these measures are worth pursuing: patients benefit from improved quality of care and access, interprofessional collaboration is attractive for health professionals, and – not least – there are also benefits in terms of health policy, since costs can be reduced as a result.

The great challenge with these measures is to find solutions which not only take account of regional and cultural differences and can be implemented in all 26 cantons, but also ensure equitable access to the health system for everyone.

Here, health services research can help us.

4. Bridging the gap between healthcare research and policy

Optimal healthcare is certainly well-coordinated care where patients are appropriately informed and involved in decision-making.

If health policy – especially in the era of digitisation – is to create a suitable framework for this, there is a need for knowledge about good practice in healthcare.

Health services research is required to deliver this knowledge. I realise that this cannot happen overnight, but a start has been made with the initiative launched by the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences (SAMS) and the National Research Programme NRP 74.

If the gap between healthcare research and policy is to be bridged, both sides need to fulfil their mutual obligations. Policymakers need to articulate their requirements more clearly and be prepared to make specific and appropriate use of research findings. And researchers, rather than seeing publications as the sole goal of their work, should seek to provide professionals and policymakers with knowledge which is relevant to practice. In addition, if both sides seek to improve data availability, we will have a better chance of improving transparency within our health system. We want to see useful health services research in Switzerland!

Ladies and gentlemen, we need to face some vital questions: What is legitimate diversity in healthcare provision in a federal state? And what differences are unjust or unjustified?

The answers to these and other questions are of great importance for policy.

Both the identification and the explanation of regional variations are of interest for policymaking – but also, in particular, answers to how unjustified differences can be reduced or eliminated. In the end, policy is concerned with shaping services.

For the future, we are reliant on strong health services research in Switzerland and, of course, we are also counting on you, the researchers.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for your attention, and I wish you many fruitful discussions.