

Accountability: The Challenge for Medical and Nursing Regulators

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Background

- Accountability is often defined in many ways and poorly operationalized*.
- Accountability has become a major issue in healthcare**.
- Little is known about health professional regulatory accountability.

* Brinkerhoff (2004).

**Brown, Procellato, & Barnsley (2006).

Purpose

To increase understanding of how regulatory bodies perceive and demonstrate accountability to their stakeholders.

Study Participants

- Sample: 22 nursing and medical provincial/territorial regulators.

Methods

- Exploratory descriptive study
- Literature review
- Semi structured interviews
- Document analysis of key published materials

Findings

- No common definition of accountability.
- Common concepts were identified such as responsibility, answerability, fairness and transparency.
- The majority agreed that they were accountable to a triad of constituents – the government, the public and their regulatory membership.

Accountability to Government

- Influenced by legislated requirements, funding, types and categories of registration.
- Perception that growing prescriptiveness leads to restricted flexibility.
- Government relations categorized as formal and informal.

Accountability to Public

- Accountable first and foremost to protect the public and act in their interest.
- Accountable to the public through legislation.
- Encouraged public input and representation in certain regulatory activities.

Accountability to Regulatory Members

- Due diligence with members' fees.
- Keep members' informed on standards of practice and regulatory changes.

Accountability Metrics

- Legislation dictated required analytics and statistics.
- Legal requirements varied across the regulatory bodies.
- Smaller jurisdictions reported fewer metrics.
- Larger jurisdictions linked metrics to improve performance.

Accountability Challenges

- Stakeholder understanding of the regulatory role.
- Reconciling transparency with privacy.
- Appropriately utilizing social media.
- Organizational costs.

Summary of Common Perceptions

- Accountability was a key regulatory concept.
- There was variation in the definition and perception of accountability.
- Self-regulation was valued as essential and a privilege granted by government.
- There was a need for a common set of indicators.
- There was a trend to provide more metrics to increase accountability.
- The public and members should have more awareness of the regulatory presence.

Recommendations

- A national set of accountability indicators is recommended – it would facilitate regulatory comparison and reduce duplication.
- National dialogue about shared accountability would be welcomed by regulators.
- Social media engagement is a key emerging area for discussion.

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