Community representation on hospital governance: a literature review

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Introduction /Aim: Partnering community is a recognised element of hospital quality improvement strategies, and the implementation of the Australian agenda for advancing the quality of health service standards. However, developing collaborative environments and partnerships can be a challenging process. The implementation of good practice requires consideration of the factors that will influence the success of an inclusive approach to hospital governance. This study is a literature review aimed at identifying key barriers and enablers to involving community representatives in hospital governance. Methods: The study uses literature review. Analysis was guided by Donabedian’s model of quality systems: structure, process, and outcome. Outcome in this case is effective community representation in hospital governance decision making on quality of care. The analysis was designed to identify key enablers and barriers to achieving this outcome. Results: The analysis indicates that: 1) Quality subcommittees set up to assist boards are a key structure for involving community representation in hospital governance structures, and 2) there are a number of challenges to effectively developing the process of community representation in hospital governance: ambiguity; inadequate valuing and resourcing; poor support and attitude amongst staff; and community representative issues including senses of isolation and intimidation by expert opinion. Conclusion: While community representation on hospital committees is a recognisable part of the reform agenda for health care services in Australia, achieving it will require collaborative work on further understanding the representatives role and the decision making process; and on adequately supporting the representational process; and developing organisational cooperation and culture in regards to the involvement of community representation.