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## Poster Abstract

### **External stakeholders' expectations and experiences regarding the Portuguese Hospital Centres – a qualitative study results**

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Horizontal integration is a way of organizing the healthcare delivery for units that provide the same type of care. The Portuguese Hospital Centres (HC) is a way horizontal integration. Two or more hospital units are integrated creating a HC. The legal support of HC, created in 1999, defined several important objectives and benefits associated to this reality namely, to reinforce of the articulation and complementarity between hospital units, driven by better resources utilization; reinforce the differentiation of hospital care delivery and hospital technology; a more efficient hospital care delivery giving to the community what they need.

Between 2005 and 2009 were created 17 HC and nowadays there are 23 HC in Portugal.

**Objectives:** Our objective in this study was to know more about the external stakeholder's expectations and experiences regarding the Portuguese Hospital Centres. External stakeholders are experts and decision makers that had political and manager responsibilities in healthcare during the last years. In this paper we present the preliminary results of this qualitative study.

**Background:** To identify the key opinions and views, and to explore people's knowledge, experience and expectation regarding the Portuguese HC, we used a qualitative research method: interviewing. There is a lack of information about this theme in Portugal. So, another reason to use this qualitative method was to gather feasible data that wasn't available in any other form. We conducted interviews to different important people with past responsibilities in health system: Secretary-of-state in Health Ministry (past function), Central Administration of Health System (ACSS) board members (past function); HC board members (actual and past functions) and academics. Interviews were conducted as long they continue to tell me more about the Portuguese HC experience. We conducted 10 interviews with external stakeholders. A semi- structured interview guide was developed based on the literature review. The main interview objectives were to collect information about: integration objectives; integration drivers; main benefits expected; the main difficulties nowadays faced by HC; the disadvantages of HC; what factors contributed to successful and unsuccessful cases of HC and the main challenges faced by HC. Transcripts of the interviews were analysed using NVivo 10. The analysis of each interview started with axial coding to relate some responses to the main HC objectives and benefits. Open coding was also used to give new insights about the other integration dimensions.

**Conclusions:** The external stakeholders referred the resource rationalization and optimization as the main integration objective. As main expected benefits they referred the improvement of quality of care (in patient dimension), cost reduction (organization dimension) and improve work conditions and training and development enrichment (professional dimension). They pointed also that the main reason for the unsuccessful integration experiences was the culture shock. According to these stakeholders the main challenge faced by the HC board is the definition of a strategic plan for the HC with clear objectives, strong leaders, definition of internal and external communication strategies and with the participation of all professionals.

## **Keywords**

**stakeholders' expectations and experiences, portuguese hospital centres, horizontal integration**

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## **Powerpoint presentation:**

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