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Healthcare Systems in Italy

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Healthcare Systems in Italy

Italy has one of the best health systems where healthcare is provided to the citizens at both regional and national levels. Through the National Health Services, popularly known as Servizio Sanitario Nazionale (SSN) program, the Healthcare services are administered to the Italian citizens through universal health coverage. Notably, the programs of health are controlled under the ¹ **ministry of health in** Italy. **The health care system** in Italy caters to the citizens' health needs under Servizio Sanitario Nazionale programs that operate from the country's regional levels by providing free and universal health coverage (WHO, 2021). The report from the Europe region office of WHO (2021) describes that the national government is mandated through health to see all healthcare bodies meet the general health objectives and fundamental principles. Therefore, this paper addresses the structure and organization of Italy's healthcare system, the health issues and challenges facing it, and the challenges that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought on the system. At the same time, the factors that made the country deal with the pandemic quickly.

Structure and Organization of Italy's Healthcare

The healthcare system of Italy is structured so that the health services are the responsibility of both the regional and national governments. Through the ministry of health, the national government has the mandate to regulate all the health policies in the country. The national level of healthcare service provision is also mandated to ensure that quality healthcare is provided to all the citizens in the country. The central government plays a stewardship role in Italy's healthcare system by providing objectives and setting standards that must be met by all the healthcare providers in the country (Ferre et al., 2014).

Again, to achieve quality healthcare in the country, the central government has always ensured that they control all the health programs at both the national and regional levels. Creating a universal health program for the citizens was done to ensure that citizens acquired health services for free at service point (Lo Scalzo, 2009). The program is known as Servizio Sanitario Nazionale (SSN), which is majorly controlled by the regional authorities in most of its operations. Specifically, the program is designed to provide coverage to all public schools' healthcare services as part of the national security program. For that reason, the central government must ensure that it collects taxes used to fund the program, purchases all the consumables and health facilities for the program, and disburses funds to the regional authorities to facilitate the program's easy rolling. However, in the private hospitals in Italy, the SSN does not apply to the patients who are required to pay for their treatment in the private hospitals. The regional governments in the Italian healthcare systems are mandated to provide primary, secondary and tertiary health care services to the citizens who live within the respective regions (Ferre et al., 2014). This means that in the healthcare system of Italy, most healthcare roles are delegated to the regions by the central government.

Consequently, the structure and organization of the healthcare system in Italy have credited the country as one of the countries with the most efficient and proper healthcare programs in the world. A good healthcare system can be gauged by various parameters, including the life expectancy, which the country has emerged among the top countries. For instance, in 2011, Italy, the sixth-largest country in Europe, registered an average life expectancy of up to 79.4 years in males and 84.5 years in women, making it the second in the region (Ferre et al., 2014). This is a clear testimony that the SSN and the role of the central government in controlling and setting health standards in the country and regions in the healthcare system has

paid off to the country. It has proven that Italy has one of the most organized healthcare structures not only in Europe but in the world as well.

Health Issues and Challenges Facing the System

Since Italy's healthcare system appears to be one of the most organized in terms of its structure of health service delivery, it is notable that it cannot lack some challenges that the relevant authorities strive to solve. Indeed, various health issues and challenges range from funds for operating the SSN, health coverage inequalities in the country and human resource challenges in the health department. Meeting the budgetary goals has been one of the biggest challenges the Italian government faces in maintaining and funding the SSN (Ferre et al., 2014). Thus, the economic challenges faced by the country mean that there is low taxation in the country, and it is from the taxes that the funds for maintaining the universal health coverage in the country are majorly found. Therefore, the reduction in funding translates to the reduced provision of healthcare services to the country's citizens. This lowers the quality of the healthcare service and prolongs the time needed by a patient to receive treatment.

Another challenge that has been registered to be facing the well-organized and structured Italian healthcare system is inequality in the healthcare administration of the regions. Being that it is perceived that different regions have different health needs, the central government in funding has always provided varying amounts toward the healthcare programs, something that has highly created inequalities in healthcare services provision (Toniolo et al., 2012). Again, the difference in policies and laws guiding healthcare in different regions of the country has also caused such inequalities. Lastly, there have been challenges in finding professional medical practitioners to steer the healthcare programs in Italy. Piscitelli et al. (2021) suggested a solution

to this challenge that the government should promote scientific innovation, which allows medical schools to advance instead of cutting the number of students that join medical schools. They believe that the solution can help cater to the medical department's future and current human resource needs.

Challenges Caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic to the System and Factors That Made the Government Deal with It Quickly

Covid-19 pandemic overstretched the health system in Italy. Italy was one of the countries that were hit hard by the first phase of covid-19 pandemic (Boccia et al., 2020). As a result, the hospitals got overcrowded, leaving no bed capacities to the patients who would require treatment for other diseases. Being that medical practitioners were the frontline soldiers against the covid-19 disease, the infection that saw a good number of them either die or get hospitalized because of the disease dealt a major blow for the healthcare system of Italy (Boccia et al., 2020). Additionally, apart from the doctors' and nurses' insufficiency in the Italian hospitals during the first phase of the pandemic, which hit the country hard, essentials like oxygen and ventilators got insufficient. So many people got infected, increasing the items' demand which was on low supply. The first phase of the pandemic was also marked with insufficient knowledge about the disease making many people in Italy be affected by the disease, hence overstressing the country's healthcare system.

Consequently, the government acted swiftly to contain the spread of the virus, which was first killing its citizens and overstressing its healthcare system. Thus, the government banned all social gatherings, imposed lockdown and curfew measures, and also pumped more resources into the healthcare system to contain the virus. Italians are known for their socialization nature, and

therefore movement restriction was critical to contain the virus (Boccia et al., 2020). In addition, the nationwide closure of schools, lockdown, and self-isolation measures greatly helped Italy overcome the disease's rapid spread (Timelli & Girardi, 2021). All these containment measures that the government and more budgetary allocation strictly enforced towards the healthcare system helped Italy combat Covid-19 disease.

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