

MSC COVID-19 Project Summary

Analysis of the coordination of major system change within the Colombian health system in response to Covid-19: study protocol

Coronavirus (Covid-19) is posing a major and unprecedented challenge to health service planning and delivery across health systems internationally. This nationally funded study is analyzing the response of the Colombian health system to the Covid-19 pandemic, drawing on qualitative case studies of three local health systems within the country. The approach will be informed by the concept of 'major system change' - or coordinated change among a variety of healthcare organizations and other relevant stakeholders - in order to identify processes that both enable and inhibit adaptation of health services to the challenges presented by Covid-19. The study will collect information on capacity "bottlenecks" as well as successful practices and forms of innovation that have emerged locally, which have the potential for being 'scaled up' across Colombia's health services.

Study design

This qualitative study will be undertaken in two phases. In the first, up to 30 stakeholder interviews will be conducted to ascertain immediate challenges and opportunities for improvement in response to Covid-19 that can be shared in a timely way with health service leaders to inform immediate health service planning. The stakeholders will be selected in order to sample a range of planning and provider organizations within the health system. In the second phase, up to 60 further interviews will be conducted to develop in-depth case studies of three local health systems at the metropolitan area level within Colombia. The interview data will be supplemented with documentary evidence and, where feasible, non-participant observation of meetings. The study will also establish mechanisms for providing timely, formative feedback to inform health system planning by ascertaining stakeholders' preferences during the interviews and wider scoping discussions.

Aim and objectives

The project will address the following research question: how are health services in Colombia responding nationally and within local health systems to Covid-19, and what organizational lessons can be drawn for informing the response to Covid-19 and in relation to future pandemics?

1. To characterize from the experiences of key actors at national and local level, the strategies and organizational resources (including human resources and infrastructure) used to respond to Covid-19 by a variety of local health systems in Colombia.
2. To identify critical coordination issues or "bottlenecks" that are constraining the capacity of local health systems to respond to the pandemic through case studies at the city or departmental level, as well as factors that facilitate the response.
3. To analyze local examples of promising innovations and practices of coordination between actors that promote responsiveness to Covid-19 for scaling up nationally and/or integrating into healthcare guidelines or protocols.
4. To establish mechanisms for sharing lessons and experiences of the crisis in a timely fashion with health system leaders and other key stakeholders to inform health service planning in relation to covid-19 and future pandemics of national and international origin.

Value of the study

The study findings will aid evaluation of the relevance of the concept of major system change in a context of 'crisis' decision-making and contribute to international lessons on improving health systems' capacity to respond to Covid-19 and future pandemics. Study findings will be shared among various stakeholders in the Colombian healthcare system in a formative and timely way in order to inform healthcare planning. Conducting the study at a time of Covid-19 raises a number of practical issues (including physical distancing and pressure on health services) which have been anticipated in the study design and research team's way of working.