

## Qualifications Required for Health Managers: A Phenomenological Research

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### Abstract

Health institutions should be managed professionally in order to use their resources efficiently, to keep pace with the change process, to be able to develop appropriate strategies against uncertainties and to achieve their targets. Therefore, the persons who manage the health institutions should have certain qualifications. This study was conducted to determine the qualifications that health managers should have. Qualitative research method was employed and phenomenological design was used to achieve the purpose in question. The research participants consist of 12 persons who have been graduated from health management department and have been serving as a head of health management department in a public university in Turkey or a head of non-governmental organization in this field. 4 professors, 2 associate professors, 4 assistant professor and 2 Heads of Non-governmental Organization were included in the research. Data required for achieving the purpose of the study were collected by face-to-face interview method and using a tape recorder. In the analysis of data, "thematic analysis" that is one of the qualitative data analysis method and "Nvivo" program that is one of the qualitative data analysis program were used. At the end of the research study, the qualifications which health managers should have were combined in three themes; "education", "experience" and "skill". This research was

considered to have importance for students, graduates and academicians of health management departments, health managers, manager candidates and health policy makers.

**Keywords:** Health Managers, Manager Qualifications, Phenomenological Research, Qualitative Research

### **1. Introduction**

Health management is defined as “the process of planning, organizing, mobilization and supervision of material and human resources for maintaining and improving the health level by health care service production” (Kavuncubaşı, 2000). Health managers are those who perform this process.

Health sector is a sector with specific characteristics, dynamics and problems. The institutions in this sector have certain duties such as using highly advanced and intensive technologies, employment of a large number of member of possession with different titles and ensuring the satisfaction of persons with various demand and expectations by meeting their needs with limited resources (Tengilimoğlu et al., 2014). Also, both internal and external environment of the health sector is highly dynamic and a rapid process of change is experienced in the environment. An increased uncertainty degree is a usual result in cases where there are large number of environmental factors, high rate of change and high complexity level (Ülgen & Mirze, 2013). The health institutions should be managed professionally to keep pace with this change process, to be able to develop appropriate strategies against uncertainty and achieve their targets.

In most developed countries, the resource share of health sector accounts for 8% - 15% of the national economy. This ratio is greater than other largest sectors of the country such as agriculture, informatics, tourism and telecommunication (Smith & Walshe, 2011). The health managers have great responsibilities in management of such a large sector. The positive impacts of the management of health institutions by professional health managers on the institutions are very high. They may include use of resources allocated to institutions efficiently, avoiding any waste of resource, improving corporate and personal performances, increasing work satisfaction and motivation of workers, affecting patient and worker safety positively and improvement in health indicators.

It has been recognized in 1910s that the management of health institutions is a separate profession and persons who will work as a manager in the health sectors should take a special education and then postgraduate programs on hospital administration have been to be opened in various universities in United States of America since 1934. The changes seen in the health management education process in the USA in historical process have required a series of change in the role, title and functions of hospital or health care service manager. While the hospital managers have not received a special education for management role previously, they are now able to receive directly field-specific education (Şahin et al., 2000). In Turkey, the job definition of health management was described by “Regulation on Work and Job Definitions of Health Care Professionals and Other Members of the Profession Working in Health Care Services” entered into force with the official gazette dated 22 May 2014. According to the regulation, the duties of health managers are as follows:

- They take part in conduction of administrative, financial and technical services of institution, determination of mission, vision, main objectives and values, evaluation of quality, standardization and accreditation works and performance.

- They take part in determination, implementation and management of financial management policies of institution.
- They conduct account, budget, financial analysis and cost analysis of institution.
- They take part in the process of planning and conducting of health care service presentations and evaluating of their results.
- They organize, conduct and inspect any services other than medical and patient care services provided in the institution.
- They take part in planning and conducting of crisis and disaster plan in the institution.
- They take part in recording of diseases, diagnosis and operations according to international disease coding system, keeping, storing, evaluating and reporting of medical and administrative statistics.
- They take part in conducting of general and medical archive services and information systems of the institution.
- They develop policies for health management, make planning or take part in these works.

As it is seen, the health managers have wide range of important duties. However, there are suggestions that lack of resources, lack of health care labor and medical tools and devices, poor management even lack of management lie at the root of quandaries in which health sector is involved and negative status in health indicators (Hayran & Sur, 1998). These suggestions are an indication that health institutions have not been managed by qualified managers. For many years, the management of health institutions has been perceived as a natural duty of physicians and the practice has been shaped according to this perception (Akdaş et al., 2008). However, leaving the duties listed above to persons who graduated from only medical faculty and have no education and experience in the field of management is an extremely wrong practice. The persons who will manage health institutions should have management skills as well as certain special qualifications for the field of health.

This study was carried out in order to determine the qualifications which health institution managers should have. Qualitative research method was used and the opinions of the heads of health management departments in universities were asked to achieve the purpose mentioned. It was aimed to determine the field-specific manager qualifications and to make contribution to literature at the end of the research. The research was considered to have importance for students, graduates and academicians of health management departments, health managers, manager candidates and health policy makers.

## **2. Material and Method**

Qualitative research method was used in the process of carrying out the research which was made in order to determine the qualifications which health managers should have. Qualitative research was defined as “an approach for understanding and discovering the meanings which individuals attribute to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2013). A qualitative research is more flexible than a quantitative research. It is possible to obtain more detailed information from the interviewee. Different data collection methods can be also used in qualitative researches (Punch, 2005).

In qualitative researches, each research includes a specific research design and analysis type (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008). In this research process, phenomenological design was used as

qualitative research design. This method is a research design which is used in order to obtain detailed information on a certain phenomenon from the participants (Lester, 1999).

Criterion-based sampling method was used as sampling method in determination of persons which are required to be interviewed to achieve the purpose of the research. The criteria used are as follows:

- Being graduated from health management department and serving as the head of health management department in a public university or
- Being graduated from health management department and serving as the head of a non-governmental organization in this field.

15 persons who meet the criteria mentioned above were determined and an appointment was requested from each one. 12 persons responded positively to the appointment request. 10 of them are men, 2 of them are women. 4 professors, 2 associate professors, 4 assistant professors and 2 heads of NGO were included in the research. Mr. Emir and Mr. Muhammet are the heads of NGO and other participants are the heads of health management department. A code name was assigned to each participant.

Face-to-face interview method was used to obtain required data to achieve the purpose of the research. The participants were asked a question "What can you say about the qualifications which health managers should have?". The interviews were recorded by using a tape recorder. All participants allowed the interviews to be recorded on the tape recorder. Using tape recorder was preferred since it allows to record the complete interview and that the participants to focus on the interview (Glesne, 2012).

In analysis of research data, "thematic analysis" which is one of the qualitative data analysis methods and "Nvivo" program which is one of the qualitative data analysis programs were used. In the thematic analysis method, the researcher focuses to find common codes and themes between the obtained data (Gibbs, 2007). The codes and themes created at the end of the analysis were examined by an assistant professor and an instructor and found suitable after making necessary changes.

### **3. Findings**

At the end of the research, the qualifications which health managers should have were combined in three themes "education", "experience" and "skill" (Figure 1).

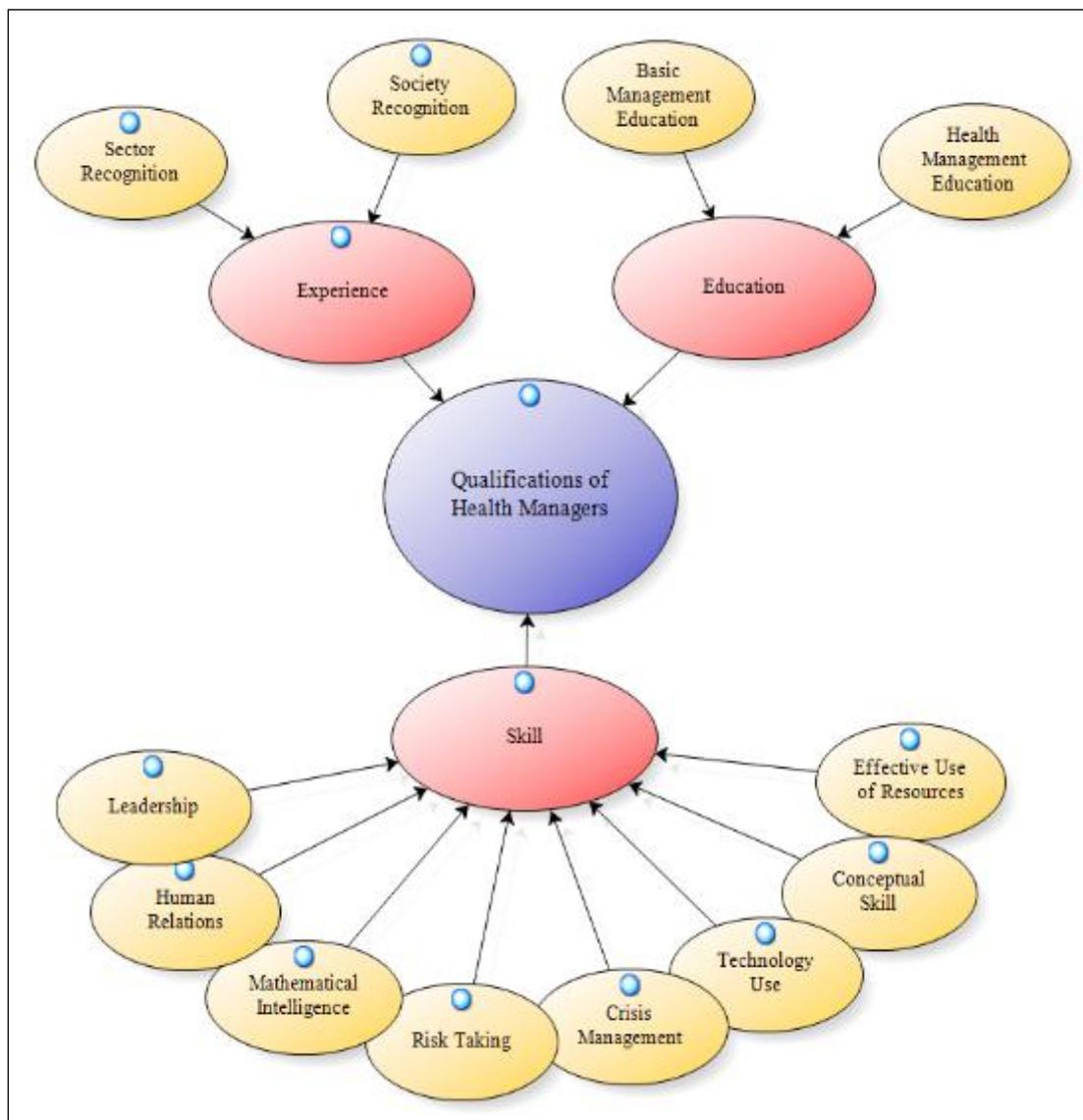


Figure 1. Qualifications of Health Managers

### Education

The educational qualifications which health managers should have were coded in 2 ways; “basic management education” and “health management education”. Some participants stated that health managers should have basic management education. For example, Mr. Ömer stated *“a health manager is the person who use management functions in the field of health. Therefore, he/she should have basic management principles and information from planning to management as well as from personnel employment to budgeting.”* and emphasized that a good health manager should necessarily receive basic management education. Similarly, Ms. Zeynep also stated *“we cannot go without mentioning the qualifications which a general manager should have as far as the health manager is concerned. A health manager should also have the qualifications which a manager should have”*.

Some of other participants’ opinions on this issue are as follows:

A health manager should be the person who is able to synthesize health and basic management and to direct and transfer this to the health organization in which he/she is involved (Mr. Mustafa).

Health management is also a specialization area of management. Therefore, a health manager must have the qualifications which a general manager should have (Mr. Muhammet).

First of all, we can describe health management as a specific area of general management. There is a field named "management" and it has sub-branches and different areas such as tourism management, education management, health management etc. First of all, a manager should have the qualifications of a general manager (Mr. Mehmet).

As it is seen, health management is not completely independent from other management areas. Therefore, the participants emphasized that first of all, health manager should receive basic management education.

Some of participants suggested that health managers should also receive education directly on health management. Some of opinions on this issue are given below:

I think that the person who will be a health manager should necessarily have received education on health management, health institutions management or health administration. It may not always be possible that the persons can come up through the system. However, he/she should complete this in the stage of education" (Mr. Ömer).

A good health manager is the manager who has received education in this field and could reflect this education into his/her work life (Mr. Enes).

The persons who receive education in the field of health management meet with success. They have education in economy, legal, statistics, cost accounting as well as health economy, health legal, biostatistics, hospital cost accounting (Mr. Muhammet).

A health manager should necessarily receive undergraduate, graduate or doctoral education on health management. Of course, the combination of them (if possible) is better (Mr. Mehmet).

As it is understood from the opinions of participants above, health managers should necessarily have graduate, post graduate or doctoral education in health management. Health management education includes directly information on functioning of health institutions and health sector and is an opportunity for the managers who do not come up through the system.

### **Experience**

The opinions of the participants suggesting that health managers should have experience in this field were coded as "sector recognition" and "society recognition". According to findings, a health manager should recognize the sector in his/her activity area. He/she should be aware of current practices in his/her field and have a good knowledge of all phases of field the macro-level to the micro-level. Examples of the participants' opinions on this issue are given below:

I think the most important characteristic of a health manager is recognizing the health field. Thus, the persons in touch with health sector and having knowledge on health should take part in this field (Mr. Ömer)

When it comes to health manager, a manager who is good in each lane of the health system comes to mind. In other words, he/she should be a good

manager when he/she manages human resources, quality as well as health tourism. All of them are the fields included in health management (Mr. Emir). A manager who has no knowledge on medical terminology, hospital costs, biostatistics- that is the sector- cannot be a health manager (Mr. Muhammet). A health manager should know the health sector, have education and certain experience, know the health legislation, be aware of functioning of health sector and have knowledge on health policies of countries (Mr. Mehmet). We can describe the health manager as “a manager at all levels who ensures efficiently and effectively management of all health institutions from primary care health institutions to tertiary care health institutions in the health sector to achieve their objectives” (Mr. İbrahim).

One of the qualifications which a health manager should have is to know well the society and read well the behavior of society. Regarding this issue, Mr. Eymen states “*Health managers should know well the structure of the society from art to culture. First of all, they should know very well the society in which they live because the workers are those from this society. Health managers should necessarily know how the society thinks.*”

### **Skill**

The skill, one of the characteristics which a health manager should have, consists of “leadership”, “human relations”, “mathematical intelligence”, “risk taking”, “crisis management”, “technology use”, “conceptual skill” and “effective use of resources” codes. Mr. Muhammet states “*A health manager should be a good leader because a good leader trains his/her sub-ordinates. Normally, managers push their sub-ordinates out and get rid of them. This attitude is very wrong and not correct*” and emphasizes that a health manager should have leadership skill.

Mr. Eymen likens health manager to a conductor. Mr. Eymen stated that:

The role of a health manager is to play a leadership role very well. Therefore, he/she should be a guide and bring coordination into the forefront. He/she should manage all workers like a conductor. A person playing an instrument in an orchestra is the expert of that field and plays that instrument very well however, if you cannot manage these instruments in harmony, a big noise will arise.

One of the skills which health managers should have is human relationship skill. Understanding the human, knowing or estimating human behavior patterns which is a manager’s characteristic is a very important factor for establishing good relationships with people who are the keystone of service sector. The participants’ opinions on this issue are given below:

At the present time, management mentality is head and shoulders above conventional management. The health manager should be a good communicator. Communication plays important role in management (Mr. Eymen).

Human relationship skill is very important in health management because a health institution is in corporation with both workers and external world (Mr. Enes).

Peer-to-peer communication with persons as well as groups and third persons is very important. Besides, public relations are also important. With regard to marketing, we deal with public relations as a factor of sales increase and development efforts which are a sub-function of marketing. Therefore, we

require a health manager who will determine market strategies, expectations of health consumers, patients, patient relatives in the market. Conventional production period is over, now the era is the era of production of whatever you want (Mr. Muhammet)

We should develop a health-specific human relations skill. We should understand the language of physicians and patients. We cannot say “what is the difference between a hospital management and a post office management?” (Mr. Mehmet).

According to the opinions of participants, mathematical intelligence is one of the skills which health managers should have because health institutions are different from other goods and service sectors. In such institutions, there are lots of interrelated factors and complex mathematical calculations. Examples of the participants’ opinions on this subject are given below:

This work is a complex work by nature. Many factors affect each other and are affected by each other. Therefore, a manager should know, analyze and synthesize interrelated factors to get good results. In my opinion, this requires quantitative intelligence (Ms. Zeynep).

These persons should have analytical skills. We all know that there are many characteristics which distinguish a hospital from a factory or a hotel. Thus, gaining financial skills has become important for a health manager in recent years. I think that a health manager should have the skill of interpretation of financial statements (Mr. Enes).

Some participants touched on the skill of risk taking. For example, Mr. Eymen and Ms. Zeynep suggested that a health manager should have the ability of risk taking and risk management. Their statements are given below:

A health manager should also be good at risk management. For example, the Ministry of Health imported 40 million TL worth of vaccine in the event of avian influenza. Has avian influenza been experienced in Turkey? No. The Ministry of Health has lost 40 million TL. If so, how we would manage so much case? How we would overcome the negative impacts which this could arise on the society? A health manager should be a little brave when making such decisions (Mr. Eymen).

Of course, the ability of fast-decision making and risk taking has been also added to these skills in recent years (Ms. Zeynep).

Crisis is a problem with which both goods-producing enterprises and service-producing enterprises face. Therefore, all organization managers should have ability and experience on crisis management. Some of the participants raised this issue. For example, Mr. Eymen expressed his opinion on this subject by saying “*Hospitals are the places which a crisis may arise 24 hours. You can see that the emergency service suddenly is filled with 300 patients. Thus, the manager should be a very good crisis manager. Health institutions are chaotic structures. The managers should have enough experience to be able to manage crises.*”

The technology use skill is one of the titles arising during interviewing. Health sector is one of the fields in which technology is commonly used. In this sector, the rate of technology usage as well as the rate of technological change is high. Thus, health managers should use technology and be aware of technological innovations. The expressions of Mr. Enes on the technology use skill are as follows:

The technology use skill is a very important qualification for a manager. We can also call this as change management skill. Especially, database for decision-making should be created in the hospital automation systems.

One of the skills that health managers should have is conceptual skill. Mr. İbrahim described the conceptual skill as *“the ability to see the organization as a whole and to estimate the results of actions being taken”*. Mr. Enes suggested that conceptual skill is an important factor for effective management of enterprises and provides the ability to see the enterprise as a whole by saying *“Of course, conceptual skill is required to be involved within knowledge and skills at first in order to manage a complex organization effectively and efficiently. The conceptual skill is the ability to consider the events with a holistic approach and to see the impact of a decision made by a department on other departments.”*

Another important subject arisen at the end of the interview is the effective use of resources skill. Mr. Enes who expressed his opinion on this subject emphasized the lack of resources in the health sector. Mr. Kerem expressed that hospital managers must use the resources of hospital effectively in order to achieve their objectives. Their expressions are given below:

There is really a lack of resource in health sector. These resources should be used effectively and efficiently. Appropriate distribution and management of accumulated funds in the hospital is a major problem (Mr. Enes).

Health manager is the person who is responsible for achieving that hospital's objectives. He/she will achieve these objectives by effectively using variables or assets within the institutions (Mr. Kerem).

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this research, the qualifications which health institution managers should have were examined from a professional perspective. In the interview process, some participants expressed that health managers should receive basic management education. However, some participants put emphasis on that basic management education as well as health management education should be received. According to them, health management is a more specific field and has specific characteristics. When curriculums of health management departments are examined, it is seen that basic management lessons are adapted to health sector and some lessons are given commonly. This situation supports the opinions of the participants. Also, health manager has been involved in “professional occupational group” in occupational classification review by International Labor Organization (ILO) in 2012.

The participants also argued that health managers should have experience. The persons graduated from health management department want to be appointed to management staff once they are graduated. Some experts participated in the research suggested that this will bring back failure due to the lack of experience. Experience is gained by performing tasks from the lowest level to highest level in the sector for certain periods. The participants also expressed that health managers should know the society, behaviors of people constituting the society, human relationships and social structure from art to culture.

The participants stated that health managers should have education and experience as well as certain skills. These skills include leadership, human relations, mathematical intelligence, risk-taking, crisis management, technology use, conceptual skill and effective use of resources skill. They also stated that a health manager should have leadership skills such as the ability to influence and guide others. Leadership also includes transfer of knowledge and experience to sub-ordinates. The participants suggest that health manager with leadership characteristics should necessarily train his/her sub-ordinates. Besides, the participants put emphasis on that

human relations skill and conceptual skill are important factors for efficiently and effectively management of enterprises and provide an opportunity for a more comprehensive understanding of the enterprise.

According to the participants; health managers should be able to take risk when necessary. This skill is required for health managers to be able to accomplish important tasks and make fundamental changes. The risk-taking skill is important especially during crisis. A health manager should necessarily a good crisis manager, in the other words turn the crisis into an opportunity.

According to the opinions of the participants; health management is complex work by nature and there are many factors affecting and affected by each other. In this context, it is very important for managers to determine interrelated factors, analyze how these factors will affect each other and to have quantitative intelligence in order to achieve success.

Another result of the research is that health managers should have the technology use skill. Health communication and technology show a rapid change with the changing world. A good health manager should manage, follow and keep up with these changes.

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