



Long-term care in South Taiwan - A case study of a nursing home in Hualien

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Abstract

Aim: This research aims to learn more about the state of long-term care for the elderly and disabled in Southern Taiwan. A nursing home in a rural area served as the study's case study.

Methodology: A qualitative approach was taken for the study's research design. The elder care market is analyzed using SWOT to determine its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Findings: This research examined the elderly healthcare industry critically, highlighting opportunities and challenges, as well as potential solutions.

Implications/Novelty: This research demonstrated that although elderly care management is a relatively new field of endeavor in Taiwan, it will soon constitute the bulk of the country's healthcare industry. It's essential for aging with grace and honor and for the efficiency of caregiving work to improve. The government should keep working to make long-term care services more available and of higher quality for the elderly with disabilities.

Key Words: Long-Term Care, Nursing Home, Elderly People, Family Care

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INTRODUCTION

The population's overall trend toward older ages is a major social force (Drucker 2000). The rapid growth of the elderly population can be directly attributed to the increase in life expectancy made possible by advances in medical technology, public health measures, and environmental standards (Walker and Mollenkopf 2007). By 2017, Taiwan is projected to have a percentage of its population aged 65 and up greater than 14 percent. This percentage will rise above 20% in 2025, at which point our society will be considered "super-aged" (National Development Council 2014). The United Nations' "Principles" for Elderly People became the basis of long-term care internationally in 1991. Principles such as "self-reliance," "participation," "care," "self-fulfillment," and "dignity" are central to U.N. tenets. One pressing concern is implementing these guidelines within a realistic economic framework (Xiao, Li, and Dai 2004).

Huang (2009) stated that cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and obesity can be avoided through regular exercise and positively affect cardiopulmonary endurance and physical fitness. Exercising is an excellent way to improve one's mental and physical health, overall outlook on life, and sense of satisfaction (Wang et al. 2004). Furthermore, it boosts one's own sense of pride and dignity. The disease risk is decreased, and healthcare costs are decreased when people engage in regular physical activity. For the elderly and society, exercise takes on added significance in our aging world (Shih and Hsu 2005). Therefore, exercise has become increasingly popular in recent years thanks to the government's and civil society's vigorous advocacy of participation in sports.

However, there is a lack of data on the state of long-term care for the elderly and disabled in Taiwan's outlying regions. This research aims to examine the current needs, opportunities, and potential of the long-term care industry in a predominantly rural region of South Taiwan.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a rapidly growing need to cope with the ageing of the population in Taiwan. The government was actively planning, and promoting “long-term care” policy (Ministry of the Interior, the Executive Yuan 2005). Kane and Kane (1987) defines long-term care as a means of providing care for the physically and mentally impaired for a long period of time, including long-term medical care, personal care and social support.

Care issues cannot exist alone, but are linked to health, life and safety issues. So the policies for long-term care, health care, life and safety care should have a holistic concern (Kang et al. 2004). At the very simplest, all the care needs of mankind are subject to the three systems of “acute care”, “chronic long-term care” and “community care”. Long-term care has the characteristics of a comprehensive, universal, accessible, transferable and public system. It is involved and affected by policy planning, promotion, community, business management, and sustainability (Pieper and Vaarama 2008). The world’s leading countries and important international organizations, including the World Health Organization (WHO), the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have all invested heavily in “long-term care”.

In recent decades, social changes have affected family, labor, housing, economy and the ageing of population, which has caused structural change and deep impact on long-term care (Ruan 2001). More and more old people are living alone. Particularly this is due to the changes in the patterns of living arrangements between generations, the geographical distancing of family members and the inability or disinclination to carry out major traditional forms of reciprocal family care within the extended family. The need for health care has shifted from “treatment” to “care”, or even “care beyond treatment” (Walker and Mollenkopf 2007).

According to the report of Ministry of the Interior, Taiwan (2014), there are different sources of long-term care for people receiving health services and care in Taiwan. The informal long-term care services include home care and community-based informal care. The formal long-term care services involve the social welfare system and the medical service system. The Government’s response to the demand for long-term care services is mainly to encourage the provision of long-term care services through policy-based incentives and subsidies. The funding is mainly from the government health department and social welfare departments. Some people have private or insurance-based care.

In 2007, the Executive Yuan issued the “Ten-Year Plan for Long-term Care in Taiwan” with the aim of constructing long-term care with multiple functions in the community. The main content is to provide a series of long-term care services, to construct the relevant legal and social framework, to build long-term care system. The goal is to maintain and improve the physical and mental function of the elderly disabled, expect to enhance and extend their independent living time.

The long-term care resources are a spectrum of diversification ranging from institutional services to family care. It comprises of informal long-term care service and formal long-term service (Wu 1996).

1. Informal long-term care services

1) Home Care: Family care is mainly by the family, or relatives and friends. It is the most important form of care and care responsibility in Taiwan.

2) Community informal care services: Community informal care services refer to the unregistered health care and recuperation organizations in the community. They provide the main source of 24-hour check-in service. However, due to the lack of regulations, management and supervision, the quality is variable.

2. Formal long-term care services

The current formal long-term care services in Taiwan can be divided into two types: institutional and community-based services. Institutional services provide the elderly 24 hours’ technical, living and accommodation services.

The proportion of disabled elderly population in Hualien County ranks first in the country (Ministry of the Interior Taiwan 2014). According to the survey of elderly people aged 65 or above in Hualien County, the old population in the Hualien area is 13.43%, the disable population is 44,823, accounting for 15.8% of the total population. Hualien County is an agricultural area. The young generations have left for work in different cities. This caused the problem of aged population and the lack of proper health care for the elderly. There was a rapid

change into an ageing society, accompanied by the urgent need for long-term care. Long-term care provisions are in short supply. Sustainable development of long-term care industry is imperative in Hualien County.

METHODOLOGY

We applied qualitative research method. We used archival sources and personal observation. As working nurses and researchers, we acted as participant observers in a long-term elderly care nursing home attached to a government hospital in Hualien during six months. SWOT analysis is mainly used to analyze the internal strengths, weaknesses and external environment, opportunities and threats (Xie 2004; Lin 2013). We collected relevant data, through direct observation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SWOT Analysis

We used the SWOT analysis to clearly understand the importance of the social environment as a basis to plan the strategy for long-term care development. It is used in the analysis of Hualien County long-term care industry (Table 1).

Strengths (S)

- Through an evaluation mechanism, the unit can begin to improve the hardware equipment, care quality, human use, and care professionals.
- In care of chronic diseases and disabilities, different care programs may be tailored to individual care needs.
- While there are various long-term health care arrangements and providers available, each unit can implement the whole-person health care policy.
- The Hualien environment is quiet, and provides plenty of space for exercise and outdoor activities.
- Recreational activities: Over several years, members of staff have designed active games and pursuits for individuals and groups in the nursing home, to restore physical and psychological functions. They help the individual through leisure activities, to achieve self-realization, and the prevention of health problems.
- In the unit where we worked, most residents were very satisfied with their care, treatment and situation, as they were not threatened by price increases because it was a government hospital. This was in contrast to residents in private units, where financial constraints meant staffing cuts and reduction in services.

Weaknesses (W)

- It becomes more expensive to stay in the institute resulting from more medical insurance and negligence cases in court with suits for damages, and high turnover of care workers.
- Staff members are difficult to supervise, because their backgrounds and education are different.
- Medical treatment at most units which are not attached to a hospital is not convenient. External links must rely on ambulances or rehabilitation-bus.
- Hualien is a rural area, access from place to place by vehicle is often not convenient, and members of staff are difficult to recruit.

Opportunities (O)

- Long-term care needs, chronic diseases, and social needs are increasing.
- The elderly population continues to grow rapidly, and the demands for health care for the elderly increase. Expectations are increasing.
- Long-term care market has not yet been substantially developed in the private sector. It is a considerable opportunity for future development in the private sector. Regulations as to the maximum number in one home, and other regulations, have loosened. The private sector groups have significantly enhanced the added value of health care services with quality services.
- Because of the implementation of long-term care insurance policy, there is an increase in the business opportunities for health care industry.

- Taiwan has currently reorganized the long-term health insurance system. This will make the impact on long-term development. There is compulsory universal tax-based health insurance. However this is for very basic care, and many people prefer to supplement this by private insurance.

Threats (T)

- There are price competition issues in terms of pay for carers, and still quite strict regulations for improving health service in health care industry.
- Family structure has changed, and the elderly usually live alone at home unattended. Other family members who used to care for them often now live far away or are too busy. The sense of obligation has been transferred to the state.
- With increasing state provision, families are beginning to make more and more demands on the state which are not always realistic, while families are taking less care of the elderly themselves. Threats of negligence law suits, and no-win-no-fee solicitors are also unhelpful.

Table 1: SWOT analysis of long-term care in Hualien

Internal Environmental Analysis	Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)
External Environmental Analysis		
	S1: Care experience. S2: Good care environment. S3: Adequate equipment. S4: Leisure activities up to self-realization.	W1: The staff turnover rate is high. W2: Located in remote area, traffic inconvenience. W3: Personnel is difficult to strictly control, some have no medical background. W4: Medical treatment is not convenient.
Opportunities (O)	SO	WO
O1: Health needs increased.	SO1: Aging needs, social needs.	WO1: Improved tissue structure and tube management system.
O2: Changes in family structure.	SO2: Increased occupancy	WO2: To expand the target market and positioning.
O3: Government policies and regulations.	SO3: Improvement of facilities.	WO3: Construction of network marketing.
O4: The market has not yet been developed.	SO4: Increase in services, extension outreach service facilities.	
O5: Elderly people business opportunities.		
Threats (T)	ST	WT
T1: Price competition.	ST1: Innovation Services.	WT1: Strive to improve facilities, build diverse entertainment and leisure functions.
T2: private agencies and excellent quality services.	ST2: Vertical integration.	WT2: Enriching expertise, and adequate care of manpower.
T3: Government system restrictions.	ST3: Management, human services, Strengthen the resilience of the strain.	WT3: Develop a clear target city field and positioning.
T4: Families may make unrealistic demands	ST4: To create a good image and reputation.	

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

With the rapid increase in the elderly population, elderly care issues have become urgent. To prevent more families from losing their original functions and operations due to the burden of care for the elderly, the government should pay more attention to the care needs of the elderly, so that the elderly can enjoy a good quality of old age (Pieper and Vaarama 2008). Private companies organizing care homes need to be aware of recent policies and to coordinate with the government to implement the recommendations.

This study showed that although the care of the elderly management is still an emerging industry in Taiwan, elderly care is bound to become the mainstream of the future health care market. In response to this important development trend, in recent years, the Government has set up related departments, such as nursing care and management for the elderly, long-term care insurance policy, welfare for the elderly, and service management for the elderly (Zheng et al. 2004). All of which are aimed at cultivating specific senior care professionals and regulating the public and private sectors (Castle and Engberg 2005).

The needs for long-term care will increase demands for a sound long-term care service. The Government also noticed that to enhance the quality of life of elderly people, leisure activities are paramount. It is through appropriate leisure activities that elderly people can improve their physical wellbeing and their quality of life. They should conduct a review and make necessary amendments in due course, so as to continue the project to which it has committed itself (Wu 1998). In the future, the Government, acting together with the private sector, should continue to actively improve the quality of long-term care, to enable an increasing number of people to enjoy affordable, accessible and quality long-term care when required (Walker and Mollenkopf 2007).

limitations and Future Research Directions

This research has limitations. Our work was confined to a six-month period of participant-observation nursing work in one nursing home run by a government hospital in Hualien. It is possible that different results would be obtained from other homes for the elderly in different areas, and from privately run nursing homes. Further research would help to clarify the degree of variations in long-term care for the elderly, according to locality, and government versus private provision.

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