



Enhancing Portuguese primary care through community-oriented primary care

Shabir Moosa^{1,2,3,4}

INTRODUCTION

Community-Oriented Primary Care (COPC) is a comprehensive healthcare approach that emphasizes the importance of community engagement and collaboration to address the healthcare needs of the population. While COPC has been implemented successfully in various parts of the world, including South Africa, it holds great promise for the Portuguese primary care system as well.

THE PORTUGUESE PRIMARY CARE LANDSCAPE

Portugal's primary care system, while effective, faces several challenges. An aging population, increasing chronic diseases, and healthcare disparities among different regions are some of the issues that need to be addressed.¹ COPC offers a holistic approach that aligns well with the Portuguese healthcare system's goals and challenges.

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY-ORIENTED PRIMARY CARE

COPC places a strong emphasis on community involvement and proactive healthcare strategies. It involves healthcare providers working closely with the community to identify local health issues and collaboratively develop solutions. This approach is based on the recognition that health is influenced by social determinants and that a comprehensive strategy must address these factors.

THE CHIAWELO COMMUNITY PRACTICE MODEL

One exemplary implementation of COPC is the Chiawelo Community Practice in Soweto, South Africa.² This model is highly relevant to the Portuguese primary care system due to its focus on community engagement, prevention, and health promotion.

The Chiawelo Community Practice, which started in the 1990s, has successfully integrated healthcare services with community development initiatives. It engages local community health workers, collaborates with local stakeholders, and offers a wide range of services. The success of Chiawelo demonstrates the potential benefits of a community-oriented approach to primary care, especially in preparation for a capitation payment model.³

VALUE FOR THE PORTUGUESE PRIMARY CARE SYSTEM

1. Addressing healthcare disparities: COPC, as demonstrated by Chiawelo, can help address regional healthcare disparities in Portugal. By involving the community in healthcare planning and decision-making, healthcare services can be tailored to the specific needs of different regions, reducing disparities in access and quality of care.
2. Promoting preventive healthcare: COPC places a strong emphasis on preventive healthcare measures. This approach can help Portugal in its efforts to reduce the burden of chronic diseases and improve overall public health by focusing on early detection and lifestyle interventions.
3. Enhancing community engagement: Community involvement is a cornerstone of COPC. By actively involving the community in healthcare planning and decision-making, the Portuguese primary care system can foster a sense of ownership and empowerment among the population.

1. Department of Family Medicine and Primary Care, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

2. Department of Family Medicine, Johannesburg Health District, Gauteng Department of Health, Johannesburg, South Africa.

3. World Organization of Family Doctors, Brussels, Belgium.

4. African Forum for Primary Health Care (AfroPHC), Johannesburg, South Africa.



4. **Improving Healthcare Efficiency:** COPC emphasizes cost-effective and efficient healthcare delivery. By focusing on prevention and early intervention, COPC can potentially reduce the healthcare system's overall costs while improving health outcomes.
5. **Strengthening primary care teams:** The collaborative nature of COPC encourages healthcare providers to work as part of a team, fostering a multidisciplinary approach to healthcare. This can enhance the skills and capabilities of primary care teams in Portugal.

CONCLUSION

COPC, exemplified by the Chiawelo Community Practice model, offers a promising approach to enhance the Portuguese primary care system. By emphasizing community engagement, prevention, and collaboration, COPC can help address healthcare disparities, promote preventive healthcare, and improve overall

healthcare efficiency. As Portugal faces evolving healthcare challenges, a shift towards COPC can be a valuable step in achieving a more inclusive, responsive, and effective primary care system.

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CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Shabir Moosa

E-mail: shabir.moosa@wits.ac.za

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7849-9751>