

RECOMMEND

## Health Technology Assessment in Vietnam: Current Situation and Future Direction

Hoang Van Minh<sup>1\*</sup>, Dang Viet Hung<sup>2</sup>, Vu Nu Anh<sup>2</sup>

Health Technology Assessment (HTA) is defined as a multidisciplinary process involving a wide range of capacities that summarizes information about the characteristics, short- and long-term effects and/or impacts of health technologies and interventions (1). HTA can also be understood as a method for assessing and analyzing medical, epidemiological, sociological, and economic aspects of health technologies and interventions (including drugs, vaccines, medical supplies, medical equipment, medical services, and public health interventions, etc.). HTA has been recognized by The World Health Organization (WHO) as a tool for successful progression toward universal health coverage (UHC) (2).

In Vietnam, given constraints in health budget, especially the shortage of health insurance fund, HTA has been being increasingly important. According to the statistics by Vietnam Social Security, drugs account for a huge portion of total health insurance expenditures, accounting for 61.6%, 41%, and 34% in 2010, 2016, and 2017. In this context, containing the drug costs and promoting efficient use the health insurance fund is considered as important task. In other words, HTA should be used as a tool for developing the list of drugs covered by health insurance, as well as payment conditions and rates.

The application of HTA was being paid attention by the government since 2013 when

it was stated in the national strategy to protect, care for, and improve people's health for the period of 2011-2020, with a vision to 2030 (issued in conjunction with Decision No. 122/QĐ-TTg dated January 10, 2013): "Develop standards and implement the assessment of health technology to identify effective and low cost health interventions, quality assurance of medical services". In 2014, the Ministry of Health had the first HTA plan developed (3). During 2014-2017, several HTA related activities were conducted in Vietnam, such as HTA conferences, workshops, training courses as well as small scale HTA research studies(4). In 2018, the Ministry of Health issued the Decision No. 5315/QĐ-BYT on the regulation for considering new drugs to be added to the list of drugs covered by the Vietnam health insurance scheme. Additionally, the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with experts, issued guidelines for preparing and evaluating pharmacoeconomic analysis reports. Since then, HTA has been used as a tool for building a list of drugs covered by health insurance, conditions for health insurance payments and rate of payment. In addition, the HTA has been served as a basis for prioritizing, making evidence-based resource allocation decisions, and developing health insurance benefit packages to help achieve universal health care coverage in Vietnam. Research institutions in Vietnam such as Hanoi University of Public Health, Health Strategy and Policy Institute, Hanoi



**Corresponding author:** Hoang Van Minh

Email: [hvm@huph.edu.vn](mailto:hvm@huph.edu.vn)

<sup>1</sup>Hanoi University of Public Health

<sup>2</sup>Department of Health Insurance, Ministry of Health

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University of Pharmacy, Health Economics Association, etc. have also developed a data repository on cost of medical services (cost unit), established Vietnamese quality of life scores based on the EQ-5D-5L system, and prepared a study to estimate the willingness to pay for QALY gain in Vietnam, etc. Ministry of Health has also developed the HTA network with members from different HTA stakeholders, such as policymakers, health service providers, researchers as well as representatives from pharmaceutical companies, etc.

Even though some progresses have been made, there are still a number of difficulties and limitations as regard to the HTA development in Vietnam such as

- Insufficient HTA governance, policies: There is still lack of HTA legal documents, guidance, tools, database that serves HTA purposes. So far, there is not an agency that officially assigned with the task of doing HTA. The connection between HTA stakeholders is still loose
- Lack of HTA human resources and capacity among both HTA decision-makers and researchers. This was due to the lack of formal and in-depth training in HTA(5) .
- Lack of data needed for HTA exercises, including both cost, effectiveness, and epidemiological data, etc.
- Lack of awareness of the importance of HTA among different stakeholders.

*In the coming time, to solve the HTA difficulties and challenges and to develop the HTA agenda in Vietnam, the following key activities need to be prioritized:*

- HTA governance and policy development: Refining the Law on Health Insurance in which specifies that HTA is encouraged in making decision on the health technologies to be included in the Vietnam health insurance scheme. Establishing or assigning official agency (ices) to conduct HTA exercises in Vietnam.

- HTA capacity building: Developing formal HTA training programs (master, PhD degrees) in Vietnam. Organizing international /national seminars, forums, training on HTA. Promoting networking in HTA.
- HTA guideline: Developing HTA guidelines such as costing, economic evaluation, etc. in Vietnam
- HTA information, data: Developing a data repository (costs, effectiveness, epidemiological data) that can be using in HTA in Vietnam. The data from health insurance system and from hospital should be shared for HTA exercises
- Raising awareness about importance of HTA: Raising awareness, knowledge, and attitudes of stakeholders about the importance of HTA evidence in the policy-making process in Vietnam.

**Keywords:** *Health Technology Assessment, health setting priority, Vietnam*

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