

Sustainability and Resilient Management in the Greek Healthcare Sector

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Abstract

In the past decade, healthcare systems globally have faced increasing pressure to demonstrate resilience and sustainability. The Greek National Healthcare System has encountered persistent challenges regarding governance, resource allocation, and organizational adaptability, raising concerns about its long-term viability. This literature review aims to explore the concepts of sustainability and resilient management within the Greek healthcare sector and to propose practical recommendations for improvement. A systematic search was conducted using trustworthy databases, such as PubMed, Elsevier, and Google Scholar. The findings highlight the importance of strategic leadership, intersectoral collaboration, staff training, and adaptive organizational culture. Emphasis is also placed on transforming healthcare delivery, strengthening hospital efficiency, and developing human resources. Key recommendations include establishing cross-departmental sustainability teams, integrating sustainability into performance metrics and budgeting, implementing training programs, and securing policy support.

Keywords: sustainability, resilient management, healthcare, leadership

1. Introduction

1.1 Healthcare sustainability and resilient management in Greece

In recent years, healthcare systems worldwide have been forced to show strong capacities to absorb shocks and managerial resistance when adapting to evolving pressures. The Greek National Healthcare System (Greek NHS) has experienced persistent difficulties related to corporate governance and resource allocation, raising significant concerns apropos its long-term sustainability (Tzafalias, 2014).

1.2 Causes of healthcare challenges

Demographic changes, pandemic outbreaks, fiscal austerity, and entrenched structural inefficiencies have exposed deep vulnerabilities within healthcare infrastructures and operations (Athanasakis et al., 2022). The Greek healthcare system, which was seriously influenced by a recent prolonged economic crisis, sustained underinvestment and the strain of recent public health emergencies, is, in fact, a particularly instructive case study for analyzing the sustainability and resilient management.

Undoubtedly, the capacity of public administration to effectively implement reforms is essential for overcoming systemic challenges. In the Greek healthcare system, the weaknesses in how administration works are particularly obvious when looking at sustainability and health management. Weber's traditional idea of bureaucracy points out that having a clear and logical structure is significant for carrying out policies. Unfortunately, the public sector in Greece has been known for favouritism and political influence, revealing how well the bureaucracy works (Kammas et al., 2023). The decisions and actions of employees who deal directly with the public have a big impact on how effective policies turn out to be. In Greece, the slow pace of administrative change and resistance at many levels often block successful healthcare reforms (Myloneros & Sakellariou, 2021). This tight structure is a big hurdle to building strong healthcare management. Hence, improving administrative skills and creating a culture of professional behavior and responsibility is crucial for making the Greek healthcare system better, especially during long times of economic and social challenges. Hospitals' existing culture and current management practices do not cultivate and contribute to continuing learning, which is of vital importance for department development, self-development and performance improvement (Souliotis & Papadonikolaki, 2024).

1.3 Modernising Greek healthcare

Despite ongoing challenges, Greece has achieved significant advancements in its healthcare system, particularly over the past few years. These improvements reflect growing commitment to modernization, enhanced service delivery, and the adoption of innovative practices aimed at meeting the evolving needs of its population. The aim of this literature review is to assess and elucidate the concepts of sustainability and resilient management within the Greek healthcare sector, with the goal of providing practical recommendations.

2. Method

This literature review was conducted through a systematic electronic search of scientific studies and articles using trustworthy and reliable databases, including PubMed, Elsevier, and Google Scholar. The search strategy involved the use of relevant keywords and their combinations in both English and Greek, such as “sustainability,” “resilient management,” “healthcare,” and “leadership.” Inclusion criteria were limited to articles published within the last five years, written in either Greek or English. Exclusion criteria included study protocols, duplicate records, articles in the process of publication, and those lacking an abstract or complete bibliography.

3. Lack of leadership and management commitment

As health systems around the globe become more and more complicated owing to changing populations, higher expenses, new technology, and staffing issues, the need for realistic and lasting improvements is stronger than it has ever been. In Greece, this reality is both promising and imperative. Thus, the need for sustainable practices, new ideas, and patient-focused care is currently driving the country's priorities.

Effective leadership is very important in healthcare, as it affects how well patient care is organized, connected, and improved (Sfantou et al., 2017). But in the Greek National Health System, there have been problems with leadership, owing to the fact that people are chosen for management roles because of political reasons instead of their actual skills and experience (Goula et al., 2021). This actually leads to old-fashioned leadership styles and practices, which create a negative workplace culture and offer less motivation among staff. New studies show that these problems stop continuous learning, which is essential for professional development, especially in healthcare, as working together and building good relationships among employees are key to making things work better (Epstein, 2014).

Ineffective leadership consists the "dark side of leadership", as it is linked to traits like being overly self-important, focusing too much on oneself, misusing power, and only talking one way. When leadership is not effective, it goes against what the organization needs. This can cause poor performance and make things less efficient. It can also harm employees' mental health, loyalty, confidence, motivation, and even how happy they are with their jobs (Koutalas et al., 2024). This situation is often described as the "toxic triangle," which happens when bad traits in employees mix with poor leadership and bad conditions in the workplace. In Greek hospitals, there may be added issues in the toxic triangle, such as leaders who just follow orders but have unmet needs for recognition and personal power. This environment often stifles professional growth, weakens management structures, and contributes to poorly developed or ineffective human resource policies. (Koutalas et al., 2024; Michailidou & Apostolakis, 2025).

Greek healthcare system has largely been developed relied on political considerations. To establish a universally accessible, community-centred system for long-term care provision, the restructuring should be based on governance reforms which promote improvements and strong decision-making skills in hospital management practices (Schulmann et al., 2024). Moreover, it is essential key efficiency and quality indicators be systematically monitored to ameliorate accountability, transparency and hospital sector performance. Meritocratic recruitment procedures as regards to leadership positions, from hospital managers to senior roles apropos health system institution and public health, are of vital importance (Kyriopoulos et al., 2025). By improving organizational and administrative issues within the national health-care system while accelerating health digitization and reforming the management model of health-care facilities, it will help achieve better quality care in Greece.

3.1 Current state of Greek healthcare system

Nevertheless, Greece has made notable progress in its health system, especially in recent years. The country has a solid foundation to advance quality of care and ensure patient safety. Legal frameworks and the creation of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Health S.A. (AQAH S.A.) in 2020 are designed to protect patient rights and oversee the governance and enhancement of care quality nationwide (ODIPY, 2025). The National Recovery and Resilience Plan highlights healthcare investment as a top priority, with dedicated funds aimed at renovating and upgrading hospitals, driving digital transformation, promoting public health and prevention, modernizing primary healthcare infrastructure, optimizing pharmaceutical expenditures, and reforming mental health and substance abuse services.

In January 2025, Greece unveiled its National Strategy for Quality of Care and Patient Safety 2025-2030 (WHO, 2025). It was developed through a collaborative process involving the Ministry of Health, the seven regional health authorities, the Agency for Quality Assurance in Health (ODIPY), the World Health Organization's Office on Quality of Care and Patient Safety, and the EU Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support under the HQC-2-Greece project. The strategy is organized around three key pillars: leadership and governance, evidence and innovation, and behavioral insights, literacy, and engagement. The key objectives include at first adoption of an efficient, accountable, as well as data-driven health system against continuous healthcare challenges, secondly trust towards a safe and reliable health system by reinforcing evidence-based clinical practices and incorporating innovative solutions, and thirdly emphasis on patient partnerships, by empowering individuals to actively manage their health issues, enhancing the overall care quality. (Ministry of Health, 2025). In this way, governance, accountability and efficiency will be enhanced in the Greek health system, while the effectiveness, safety of care and greater patient engagement will be fostered through a shared vision and collaborative approach.

The strategic core of sustainable healthcare in this shifting landscape is the patient-centred care. The sustainability should be structural and measure what matters, carbon and waste, climate-resilient and net zero, apart from revenue (Bobini & Cicchetti, 2025). Devices which could be repaired and reused, digital tools to bring care to patients to shrink carbon footprints while growing access as well as mobile diagnostics, cloud support and remote training, could close the gap between expertise and healthcare professionals. A sustainable healthcare ecosystem is feasible if Greece's health system is transformed based on procurement reform, equity, data-driven prevention and public-private convergence (Geropoulos et al., 2024). By investing in data-driven solutions and committing to collaboration, evidence, and most important to accountable leadership, the health system could become more inclusive and resilient.

3.2 Transforming healthcare delivery to meet complex health needs

To properly meet the needs of ageing population, the Greek National Health System is necessary to go beyond just having a personal doctor model. Taking advantage of the many specialists

available in primary care and moving to a team approach could be a smart and practical way to handle health care. Nowadays, with more people having multiple health issues and complex needs, multidisciplinary teams are important since a personal doctor may not be able to care for patients efficiently (Kyriopoulos et al., 2025).

Many hospitals in Greece were built more for political reasons than actual health needs, so it is very important to reorganize the hospital system based on health statistics and location (Kyriopoulos & Mossialos, 2021). This reorganization should also include changes about decision-making processes independence from the Ministry of Health, and improvements regarding health management. Regular measurement on quality of healthcare would encourage transparency, accountability and evaluation of hospital performance. For that reason, the creation of a universal, community-based, long-term care system and the integration of health and social care systems is also crucial (Athanasakis et al., 2022).

Beyond making changes to all levels of healthcare, it is important to create detailed health information systems and data governance structures for managing data. Health information is vital for guiding improvements, checking results, and ensuring accountability (Kadokia & Desalvo, 2023). A coordinated plan on the digital transformation of the health system is essential; thus, a close cooperation between the Ministry of Digital Governance and the Ministry of Health is absolutely necessary. Enhancing community engagement and fostering collaboration among diverse political groups with a shared focus on improving the health system and public health are essential strategies for addressing the challenges that lie ahead (Kyriopoulos et al., 2025).

3.3 Collaboration between sectors for sustainable health improvements

The connection between support systems and health results is being recognized more and more as a key part of creating a healthcare system that is fair and lasting. It is essential to combine research from different fields to connect studies on health policy and economic stability (World Economic Forum, 2025; Lee & Kim, 2018). This is especially important because policy decisions are to be based on what people really need and what the evidence shows. Coordinated governance, inter-sectoral collaboration, and data-driven monitoring systems help leaders know if they are effective and can reach their goals. This requires a research plan that emphasizes on sustainability, scalability, and adaptability so as to build strong health systems supported by inclusive welfare state policies. In this way, cross-sector collaboration could be ameliorated and promoted among public health, urban planning, and other relevant fields as there are so many overlapping duties among the Ministry of Health, administrative regions as well as local health authorities (Kyriopoulos et al., 2025; Riva et al., 2021; Tan et al., 2019; Ahsan & Khawaja, 2024).

3.4 Staff training as a cornerstone of sustainable and resilient healthcare

Effective staff training in sustainable and resilient healthcare is fundamental for embedding such practices into healthcare management. In the healthcare context, training not only conveys knowledge of environmental and operational best practices but also develops soft skills and managerial competencies that are required for adaptive leadership, interdepartmental collaboration, and feedback loops (ODIPY, 2025). These skills are essential in resilient systems, which must adjust rapidly in response to shocks (such as pandemics, natural disasters, or supply chain disruptions) and strongly encourage continuous learning, mentorship, and infrastructure which support change management. Hibbert et al. (2021) underline that successful programs are those which assist staff in having opportunities to lead quality projects, receive feedback, and have organizational support for learning and adaptation (Hibbert et al., 2021).

3.5 Challenges, strategic leadership and decision-making

Greek healthcare faces barriers in fully leveraging staff training for sustainability and resilience. Surveys of organizational behavior in Greek healthcare find limited employee involvement in sustainability initiatives, as a result of lack of education, limited awareness of environmental issues, and weak communication cited as major impediments (Sepetis et al., 2024).

Strategic leadership and decision-making skills should also refer to administrative leaders who must be adept in strategic management to be capable of navigating the sector's complexities. Specialized programs should also target managers and leaders, equipping them with the capability to analyze the external environment, evaluate potential opportunities and threats, and formulate effective management strategies that align with sustainability objectives and strengthen organizational resilience (Pakos & Mpogiatzidis, 2025).

3.6 Human resource development and organizational culture

Human resource development and the amelioration of organizational culture could be a strong key factor for improving the work performance and satisfaction. The WHO's initiative to transform nursing leadership in Greece points out the importance of leadership competencies in addressing healthcare delivery challenges, improving job satisfaction and improving system resilience. By investing in human capital, healthcare institutions can cultivate a workforce capable of adapting to challenges and driving sustainable practices (WHO, 2025).

Operational efficiency and technological integration should be further fostered. Hence, administrative staff must be proficient in process optimization, technology adoption, and implementation of sustainability practices (Vasileiou et al., 2024). In this way, they will be able to integrate them into their daily operations and contribute to long-term organizational success. Crisis management and adaptive leadership are also important to lead confidently through turbulent times, as their core characteristics are rapid adaptation and continuous learning giving emphasis to proactive problem-solving and anticipating challenges (Aouad et al., 2024). By

preparing administrative staff for potential crises, healthcare organizations can enhance their resilience and ensure continuity of care during emergencies.

3.7 Sustainability and efficiency in Greek hospitals

Although awareness of sustainability is gradually increasing among healthcare professionals in Greece, the extent of practical integration remains limited. Recent studies indicate that some healthcare institutions have begun establishing sustainability or environmental committees, reflecting an initial shift toward more structured approaches (Sepetis et al., 2024). (Spanakis et al., 2025).

In parallel, studies on efficiency and operational performance across Greek public hospitals reveal mixed results. Evaluations conducted using both production-based and economic efficiency models have shown moderately stable efficiency levels at a national level, but with significant variation between individual institutions. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed these disparities, as many hospitals experienced sharp declines in efficiency under the strain of increased demand. Notably, inefficiencies of scale became more apparent during this period, highlighting the need for more resilient and adaptive operational frameworks (Mitakos & Mpogiatzidis, 2024).

4. Recommendations

To advance sustainability and build resilience within the Greek healthcare sector, a multi-level, system-wide approach is crucial. Utilizing collaborative leadership models and supported by recent empirical studies, the following key recommendations are proposed:

4.1 Establish cross-departmental sustainability teams

Healthcare organizations should formally create interdisciplinary sustainability teams that include line managers from departments such as finance, operations, human resources, procurement, and facilities management. These teams would be responsible for co-creation of sustainability and resilience strategies, overseeing implementation, tracking progress, and disseminating best practices among units (Mane et al., 2024).

4.2 Develop comprehensive training and awareness programs

Sustainability and resilience education must extend beyond senior leadership to include middle and lower management levels. Tailored training programs should address key topics, such as climate change, environmental sustainability, sustainable procurement, and operational resilience. Moreover, these initiatives ought to emphasize how everyday choices influence long-term sustainability results, fostering a culture of responsibility and informed action among all staff tiers. Healthcare leadership training programs ought to prioritize inclusive and collaborative leadership, psychological safety, open communication, and staff recognition (Draghici et al., 2021).

4.3 Integrate sustainability into performance indicators and budgeting

Sustainability goals should be explicitly embedded in departmental performance metrics and budgeting processes. Examples include measurable targets for energy or waste reduction, the percentage of sustainable procurement practices adopted, or the expansion of telemedicine services. The connection of sustainability with key performance indicators (KPIs) and managerial evaluations could greatly contribute to organizational alignment and commitment (Dolcini et al., 2025).

4.4 Secure policy and resource support

System-wide transformation requires support from national health authorities and policymakers. Government frameworks should explicitly incorporate sustainability and resilience as pillars of public health strategy. This includes regulatory oversight, performance incentives, and the strategic allocation of resources, particularly through EU recovery funds and national investment programs, to support local implementation efforts across hospitals and health centres (Teo et al., 2023).

5. Conclusion

For the Greek healthcare system, being sustainable and resilient is absolutely essential. The country has been recently dealt with serious environmental challenges, ongoing money troubles, a changing population, and the very real threat of sudden crises like pandemics hitting again. For this reason, the design of healthcare systems needs to be flexible and built to last. Collaborative leadership will offer a compelling pathway towards transformation. Although Greece has made encouraging strides, it is essential to confront any key barriers including limited awareness, insufficient feedback mechanisms, constrained resources, and rigid hierarchical structures. This will require deliberate, coordinated action across all levels of the healthcare system. Healthcare institutions have the opportunity to shift from reactive to proactive systems that promote sustainability and resilience, while also ensuring the delivery of high-quality, equitable, and efficient care for the population they serve.

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