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INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MEDICAL FACILITY STRATEGY – CONCEPTUAL MODEL

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Purpose: This article is another in a series of publications whose primary goal is to introduce the use of integrated management systems in healthcare facilities and their connection to strategy. Due to the broad scope of the topic, the primary research issue addressed in this study is to discuss how management system integration can impact the strategy of healthcare organizations. The primary goal, in turn, is to discuss the possibilities of integrating management systems and their potential impact on the implementation of the adopted strategy. Due to the nature of the article, the thesis is that management system integration serves as a strategy implementation mechanism in healthcare organizations.
Design/methodology/approach: The article is based on theoretical analysis and literature review.
Findings: The article describes the theoretical assumptions regarding integrated management systems, their premises and possibilities of application in medical facilities, defining the directions of further research.
Research limitations/implications: The presented content constitutes an outline of further research area.
Practical implications: The presented considerations and references to theories constitute the basis for further research, which will enable the identification of a possible impact on improving the management and quality of health services provided in medical facilities.
Social implications: Undertaking research based on the theoretical assumptions described should improve the management of medical facilities and more rational use of resources in order to improve the access to services and their quality and safety.
Originality/value: The article is addressed primarily to health care managers, as well as economists and public administration employees dealing with the issues of management in health care and public health.
Keywords: Healthcare system, Integrated Management Systems, quality, public management, strategic planning, strategic management, health strategies.
Category of the paper: General review.

1. Introduction

The concept of an "integrated management system" (IMS) – as is commonly known – does not have a single, universally accepted definition. However, an analysis of the literature allows for clear directions for its interpretation. Generally speaking, an IMS refers to the integration of various management areas within a single, coherent organizational system, encompassing objectives, processes, resources, and mechanisms for supervision and improvement.

The earliest and most classic definitions originate from the literature on the integration of quality and environmental systems. Karapetrovic and Willborn argued that integration involves combining separate management systems into a single, cooperative whole, while Karapetrovic's later work emphasized the importance of linking both standards and their corresponding organizational systems (Karapetrovic, Willborn, 1998; Karapetrovic, 2002). In this approach, an IMS primarily signifies the structural and functional interconnection of management subsystems.

The next stage in the development of the concept was brought about by the work of Wilkinson and Dale, who emphasized that integration should not be reduced to the formal combination of system documentation. These authors pointed out that the essence of an IMS is the creation of a coherent management concept encompassing organizational goals, processes, and practices (Wilkinson, Dale, 1999). This approach was further developed by Jørgensen, Remmen, and Mellado, who distinguished three levels of integration: system compatibility, process coordination, and integration based on organizational culture and learning (Jørgensen et al., 2006). Thus, integration was linked to organizational maturity, not just the formal level.

A significant expansion of the IMS definition was introduced by the work of Asif et al., who proposed a process-based and meta-management approach. In their view, an integrated management system should be designed around key organizational processes and stakeholder requirements, rather than around individual norms or standards (Asif et al., 2009, 2010). Integration therefore means jointly managing processes, resources, and governance mechanisms, leading to the creation of an overarching management architecture.

In the monographic literature, the IMS concept is developed towards a systems and strategic approach. Bugdol and Jedynak point out that an integrated management system can take various forms: from partial integration to full system integration, and its essence is the holistic management of an organization through shared goals, processes, and resources (Bugdol, Jedynak, 2015). A similar approach is presented by Nunhes, Bernardo, and Oliveira, who identify a set of guiding principles for IMS that enable the unification of research and practical approaches (Nunhes et al., 2019). Chountalas and Lagodimos, in turn, point out that contemporary IMS research is shifting from the issue of norm integration towards an analysis of the organizational value and strategic significance of integration (Chountalas, Lagodimos, 2024).

A resource-process approach has also emerged in recent literature. Ispas, Mironeasa, and Silvestri define IMS as a set of interconnected processes utilizing a common pool of human, informational, and material resources to achieve multiple goals for various stakeholders (Ispas et al., 2023). This approach emphasizes the importance of resource sharing and functional integration as key elements of the system. In Polish literature, however, definitions of integrated management systems are more unambiguous and normative. Grzesiak and Grzesiak define IMS as a single, coherent, and documented system enabling the simultaneous management of multiple aspects of an organization's operations through unified policies and goals (Grzesiak, Grzesiak, 2010). Łunarski, in turn, views integrated management systems as a tool supporting organizational management through the integration of standard systems (Łunarski, 2011). These approaches are complemented by the work of Łukasiński, who embeds IMS within the concept of pro-quality organizational development and maturity (Łukasiński, 2012, 2016).

Based on the literature review, four main definitional approaches to integrated management systems can be distinguished: normative, process, systemic-strategic, and cohesion (characteristic of the Polish literature). The normative approach focuses on the integration of standard requirements, the process approach on common management processes and mechanisms, the systems approach on the overall organizational architecture, and the cohesion approach emphasizes the uniformity of an organization's policies and goals. Consequently, it should be concluded that the contemporary understanding of integrated management systems goes beyond the simple integration of standards and documentation. IMS is currently viewed as an integrated management architecture encompassing processes, resources, goals, and stakeholders, enabling an organization to function effectively in a complex and multidimensional environment.

The concept of "strategy", in turn, is a key concept in management and quality sciences. However, as with integrated management systems, it lacks a single, universally accepted definition. In the literature, strategy is conceptualized as a plan of action, a pattern of behavior, a set of decisions, or a method for achieving competitive advantage. The diversity of these approaches stems from the evolution of strategic management theory and the changing organizational environment. One of the most classic definitions was formulated by Chandler, who defines strategy as the setting of long-term organizational goals and the adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resources necessary to achieve them (Chandler, 1962). In this approach, strategy is planning and structural in nature, and its essence lies in the rational alignment of organizational goals and resources.

A different approach was proposed by Porter, who defines strategy as a method of competing and building competitive advantage (Porter, 1980, 1985). In his view, the key factors are the organization's position in the environment and the ability to achieve above-average results through the appropriate selection of strategic actions. Strategy is closely linked to the analysis of the environment and sector.

A significant expansion of the concept of strategy was introduced by Mintzberg, who questioned its exclusively planning nature and proposed the concept of the so-called "5Ps of strategy". According to this approach, strategy can be understood as a plan, a pattern of action, a position, a perspective, and a maneuver (Mintzberg, 1987, 1994). The distinction between intended and emerging strategy is particularly important, which emphasizes the dynamic and adaptive nature of strategic management.

Contemporary literature expands on these approaches, emphasizing the importance of strategy as a tool for coping with environmental uncertainty and complexity. Grant points out that strategy encompasses not only the definition of goals and directions of action but also the organization's ability to adapt and utilize resources in changing conditions (Grant, 2022). Similarly, Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington conceptualize strategy as a long-term direction for an organization's development, taking into account the configuration of resources and stakeholder expectations (Johnson et al., 2020).

A process approach also appears in the literature, according to which strategy is not merely a document but a continuous process encompassing planning, implementation, and control of activities. This approach is developed, among others, by Ansoff, who views strategy as a set of decision-making rules defining an organization's relationships with its environment (Ansoff, 1965). Similarly, Kvint defines strategy as a system of actions aimed at achieving long-term goals in conditions of volatility and resource constraints (Kvint, 2009).

In Polish literature, definitions of strategy are consistent with international scholarship, but more often emphasize its practical and decision-making nature. Obłój defines strategy as a set of key choices regarding the organization's course of action and methods for building competitive advantage (Obłój, 2007). Krupski, on the other hand, views strategy as a process of managing the development of an organization, encompassing both planning and implementing activities in a changing environment (Krupski, 2008). In both approaches, strategy is a tool for shaping the organization's future through conscious choices.

Based on the literature review, four main definitional approaches to strategy can be distinguished. First, the planning approach, focusing on goals and resource allocation. Second, the competitive approach, emphasizing building market advantage. Third, the behavioral and emergent approach, emphasizing the dynamic nature of strategy. Fourth, the process and systems approach, conceptualizing strategy as a continuous process of managing an organization in relation to its environment. Consequently, it must be concluded that the contemporary understanding of strategy goes beyond its classical conception as an action plan. Strategy is now viewed as an integrated concept of organizational management, encompassing goals, resources, processes, and relationships with the environment, as well as a tool for adapting to conditions of uncertainty and complexity.

2. Contemporary research on integrated healthcare management

In the contemporary literature, strategic management in healthcare is evolving towards a systems-based, long-term, and adaptive approach. Healthcare organizations operate in conditions of high uncertainty and complexity, which requires a shift from short-term planning to a strategy based on systems thinking and the ability to continuously adapt (Huebner, 2022). Available research confirms that strategic planning remains significantly linked to organizational performance, but this relationship is indirect and depends on the implementation capabilities and resources of the organization. At the same time, it is indicated that the quality of management practices has a direct impact on the quality of healthcare (Ward et al., 2025). In Polish literature, this issue is analyzed primarily in the context of public sector reforms and the "New Public Management" concept, indicating that implementing public management tools leads to increased efficiency, but its effectiveness is strongly determined by the institutional and regulatory context (Klich, 2014; Frączkiewicz-Wronka Austen, 2011).

One of the key developments in the literature is the concept generally referred to as "integrated healthcare" (or "coordinated medicine"), which addresses the fragmentation of healthcare systems. This integration encompasses multiple levels, from the clinical to the systemic level, and aims to improve continuity of care and the patient experience (Hafiz et al., 2024; Barr, 2024). At the same time, available research indicates that the effects of integration are varied and depend on the systemic context and the adopted implementation models. It is worth noting that this concept is closely linked to the "value-based healthcare" (VBHC) approach, which focuses on maximizing health value through the integration of clinical outcomes and costs (De Mattia et al., 2024). However, implementing VBHC requires organizational transformation, including data integration, changes in financing models, and the development of performance measurement systems. Polish literature, on the other hand, emphasizes that implementing this concept encounters significant institutional and organizational barriers (Czerw, Pajewska, Partyka, 2023).

Another important area of research is integrated management systems, which encompass the integration of various organizational functions, such as quality, safety, process efficiency, and environmental aspects. Available research indicates that integrating quality and environmental management systems can lead to improved operational efficiency and the quality of patient care (Simion Luduşanu et al., 2025). Simultaneously, concepts of integrated safety management are being developed, which connect various levels of the healthcare system and emphasize the need for a holistic approach to patient safety (Vella Bonanno et al., 2025). The effectiveness of quality interventions depends on their integration with management practices and organizational culture (Hajiyeva, Jarl, Saha, 2025). It is worth emphasizing that in the Polish literature, these issues are mainly analyzed in a fragmented manner, which indicates the need to build comprehensive models integrating various management areas.

Performance measurement tools and organizational maturity models are essential elements of contemporary management systems. It has been pointed out that such a popular tool as the Balanced Scorecard has evolved into a tool supporting strategy implementation, not merely monitoring performance (Prenestini Lega, Masella, 2024). At the same time, the importance of maturity models is growing, allowing for the assessment of an organization's level of development across various dimensions, including management, processes, and technology (Aiwerioghene, Lewis, Rea, 2024).

In the literature on the subject, process management and the "Lean Healthcare" concept are gaining increasing importance. Available research indicates that its implementation leads to improved operational efficiency, quality of care, and cost reductions, but its effectiveness in this regard depends largely on the organization's ability to manage change (Talero-Sarmiento et al., 2024). Polish literature, however, emphasizes that this concept should be treated as a comprehensive management philosophy, not just a set of optimization tools (Rydlewska-Liszkowska, 2015).

The growing importance of information technology and knowledge management is also worth noting. Integration of IT systems influences workflow, care coordination, and the quality of decision-making (Cachata et al., 2024). Polish literature indicates that information systems constitute the foundation of knowledge management and support decision-making processes in healthcare organizations (Korczak, 2018).

Analysis of the available literature and research conducted to date indicates that contemporary healthcare management is integrated and multidimensional. Strategy, quality, safety, operational processes, and information technology form a coherent management system focused on creating value for patients. At the same time, a significant research gap is evident. The literature, particularly domestic literature, focuses on selected aspects of management, such as systemic reforms, Lean Healthcare, and knowledge management, while attempts to integrate them within a unified theoretical model are less common.

3. “Healthy Future”

The "Healthy Future" strategy is one of the key guiding documents for healthcare policy in Poland, setting a framework for the development of the healthcare system in the medium and long term. This strategy, introduced by the Act of December 6, 2006, on the Principles of Development Policy (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2021, item 1057, of 2022, item 1079, 1846), is part of a broader framework for strategic public health management, the aim of which is to increase the system's efficiency, improve the quality of services, and strengthen its resilience to demographic and epidemiological challenges.

The development of the "Healthy Future" strategy was a response to a number of significant systemic challenges, including an aging population, the growing number of chronic diseases, inequalities in access to services, and staffing and financial constraints within the system. Experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic further spurred its development, highlighting the need to increase the flexibility and adaptability of the healthcare system. This strategy is also strongly linked to European Union policy, particularly in the areas of digital transformation, strengthening coordinated care, and improving the efficient use of public resources.

The "Healthy Future" strategy is based on several key pillars that guide the healthcare system. The first is the development of patient-centered care, particularly strengthening primary care and coordinated care. The goal is to ensure continuity of treatment and improve the patient experience through better integration of healthcare services. The second key area is the digital transformation of the healthcare system. This includes the development of e-health, the interoperability of information systems, and the use of medical data in decision-making processes. Digitalization is seen as a key factor in increasing the efficiency and accessibility of healthcare services. Another pillar of the strategy is the development of medical personnel. The document highlights the need to increase the number of healthcare professionals, improve working conditions, and strengthen competencies, particularly in the areas of new technologies and management. An equally important element is improving the quality and safety of healthcare services. The strategy assumes the development of quality monitoring systems, process standardization, and the implementation of tools for assessing treatment outcomes.

The "Healthy Future" strategy aligns with a modern approach to healthcare system management, characterized by the integration of various levels of governance and a focus on health value. This document moves away from a fragmented approach to reforms in favor of a comprehensive system transformation. From a strategic management perspective, linking health goals with financing mechanisms and performance measurement systems is particularly important. The strategy assumes a shift towards a value-based healthcare model, in which the relationship between health outcomes and costs is crucial.

However, it should be emphasized that despite the conceptual coherence of the "Healthy Future" strategy, its effective implementation is associated with a number of challenges. The most important include institutional constraints, staff shortages, system fragmentation, and the need to coordinate activities between different levels of public administration. Ensuring an appropriate system for monitoring and evaluating the strategy's implementation is also a significant challenge. Without effective evaluation mechanisms, it is difficult to ensure the achievement of the assumed goals and to implement necessary adjustments.

In summary, the "Healthy Future" strategy is a comprehensive concept for transforming Poland's healthcare system, responding to contemporary demographic, technological, and organizational challenges. Its significance extends beyond the operational dimension, providing a foundation for the long-term development of the system and improving the health of society.

4. Methods

Due to the conceptual nature of the study and the objective of developing a theoretical model explaining the relationship between integrated management systems and strategy implementation in healthcare organizations, a structured literature review was adopted as the primary research method. This approach was selected because the identified research problem concerns the integration of concepts originating from different research streams, including strategic management, integrated management systems, quality management, and healthcare management.

The literature selection process was conducted in several stages. First, publications addressing integrated management systems, strategic management, healthcare management, quality management, organizational integration, and strategy implementation were identified. Both international and Polish scientific literature were included in order to capture the evolution of concepts and to consider the specific institutional context of the Polish healthcare system. Preference was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, academic monographs, and widely recognized theoretical works representing the major streams of research.

The selection criteria included: thematic relevance to integrated management systems, organizational strategy, or healthcare management; scientific quality of the publication, reflected by publication in recognized scientific journals or academic publishers; conceptual or theoretical contribution to the analysed issues and relevance to the research objective of explaining the relationship between management system integration and strategy implementation. Priority was given to recent publications reflecting current developments in the field, while seminal theoretical works were included to provide the conceptual foundations of the analysis.

The analytical procedure consisted of four stages. First, the identified literature was reviewed to determine the main theoretical approaches and definitions relating to integrated management systems and organizational strategy. Second, a comparative analysis was conducted to identify similarities and differences between competing concepts and management models. Third, the results of the literature analysis were synthesized to identify the main dimensions linking strategy, organizational processes, resources, and management systems. Finally, deductive reasoning was applied to develop a conceptual model explaining how an integrated management system may support strategy implementation in healthcare organizations.

The analysis was complemented by a review of strategic documents, particularly the Polish "Healthy Future" strategy, in order to relate the theoretical findings to the current strategic framework of the national healthcare system. The document analysis served as contextual support rather than an independent empirical investigation.

The adopted methodological approach is exploratory and conceptual. Its purpose is not to empirically verify hypotheses but to integrate dispersed theoretical knowledge, identify existing research gaps, and develop a coherent conceptual framework that may serve as a basis for future empirical studies.

5. Conceptual model

This study is theoretical and conceptual in nature, and its goal is to identify and structure the relationship between management system integration and the implementation of a healthcare facility's strategy. The research approach adopted is based on a qualitative analysis of the relevant literature, as well as deductive and synthetic methods. This mechanism is presented in Figure 1.

The discussion presented above outlines the direction for research in this area. Therefore, it is advisable to propose a conceptual model based on a systems and process approach, according to which a healthcare facility is treated as a complex organizational system integrating strategic goals, operational processes, and resources. The model assumes that an integrated management system serves as a strategy implementation mechanism, not merely a tool for formally integrating standards.

This model incorporates three key assumptions:

- strategy determines the direction of the organization's activities,
- integrated Management System integrates processes and resources around strategic goals,
- organizational effects are the result of coherence between these elements.

It should be emphasized that the proposed model is layered and encompasses four basic levels:

The strategic level, which includes the following elements:

- strategic goals (e.g., quality of care, accessibility, efficiency),
- development directions resulting from the strategy (e.g., "Healthy Future"),
- stakeholder expectations (patients, regulator, staff).

The function of this level is to define what a given healthcare facility wants to achieve.

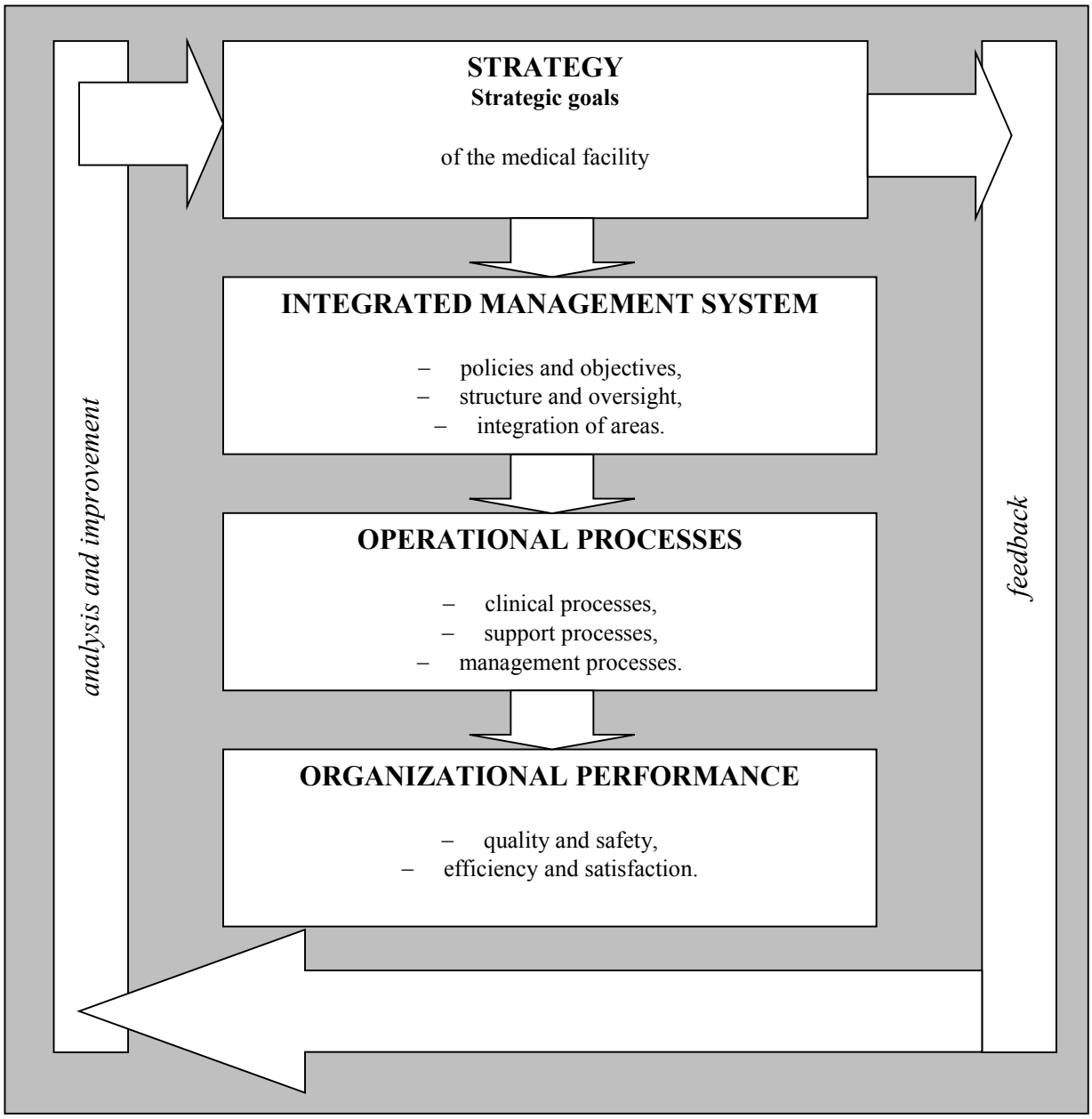

Figure 1. A model of the relationship between organizational culture and the integration of management systems in healthcare facilities.

Source: Own study.

The systemic level, which includes:

- integrated policies and goals,
- management structure,
- mechanisms for supervision and improvement (e.g., audits, KPIs),
- integration of areas: quality, safety, environment, and IT.

The function of this level is to translate the adopted strategy into the management system.

The process level, focusing on:

- clinical processes (healthcare services),
- supporting processes (IT, HR, procurement),
- management processes (planning, control, improvement).

The function of this level is to operationalize the strategy through actions.

Outcome level:

- health outcomes (treatment outcomes),
- quality and patient safety,
- cost-effectiveness,
- stakeholder satisfaction.

The function of this level is to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy and the Integrated Management System.

A key element of the model are integrating mechanisms that connect all levels, including:

- process management, ensuring the coherence of activities,
- information systems, integrating data and supporting decisions,
- metrics and KPIs (e.g., Balanced Scorecard), linking strategy with operations,
- organizational culture, which conditions actual integration (not just formal integration).

In the proposed approach, an integrated management system is not merely a "set of standards" but serves as a platform for strategy implementation, integrating various dimensions of management into a single, coherent system. Therefore, it can be concluded that the presented model addresses the research gap identified in the previous discussion: the lack of a comprehensive approach combining strategy, quality, processes, and the healthcare management system.

6. Discussion

The conceptual model developed in this study is generally consistent with previous research on integrated management systems and strategic management in healthcare. At the same time, it extends existing knowledge by proposing a comprehensive framework linking strategy implementation with integrated management systems. Integrated management systems are no longer perceived solely as a tool for the formal integration of norms and standards, but are increasingly serving as a platform for implementing organizational strategy. In this context, linking operational processes, resources, and mechanisms for supervision and improvement with strategy becomes particularly important.

At the same time, the literature points to a significant research gap: the lack of comprehensive models integrating various management areas, such as quality, safety, processes, and strategic management. The conceptual model proposed in this article attempts to address this gap by presenting integrated management systems as a mechanism that unites the strategic, systems, and operational levels. This approach is particularly important in the healthcare sector, where system fragmentation and a multitude of regulations lead to duplication of activities and administrative burden, thus generating unnecessary costs.

It is worth emphasizing that the effectiveness of management system integration is strongly dependent on organizational factors, such as organizational culture, staff competencies, and the level of development of information systems. The mere formal integration of standards (e.g., ISO, accreditation) does not guarantee improved results unless accompanied by genuine integration of processes and goals. In this context, a process-based approach and a focus on patient value, consistent with the concept of value-based healthcare, are particularly important.

The discussion also confirms that implementing the "Healthy Future" strategy requires coherent management tools to enable its operationalization. An integrated management system can play a key role in this regard, but its implementation, unfortunately, often encounters institutional, organizational, and resource barriers. This indicates the need for further empirical research on the degree of management system integration and its impact on the efficiency and quality of healthcare.

The proposed conceptual model is consistent with previous studies indicating that integrated management systems should be viewed as organizational management architectures rather than merely integrated sets of standards. This observation supports the process-oriented approach proposed by Asif et al. (2009, 2010), who emphasized the integration of organizational processes and governance mechanisms. Similarly, Nunhes et al. (2019) argued that integrated management systems should be based on common management principles rather than isolated standards.

However, unlike most previous studies, which primarily analyse integrated management systems from the perspective of quality, environmental management or operational integration (Karapetrovic, 2002; Wilkinson, Dale, 1999; Chountalas, Lagodimos, 2024), the proposed model explicitly links IMS with the implementation of organizational strategy in healthcare facilities. In this sense, the integrated management system is conceptualised not only as an operational management tool but also as a mechanism supporting strategic execution.

The proposed approach is also consistent with recent healthcare management research emphasizing integrated care, value-based healthcare and system-wide coordination (Hafiz et al., 2024; De Mattia et al., 2024). These studies underline the importance of integrating organizational processes to improve patient outcomes. The present paper extends these observations by proposing a conceptual mechanism explaining how strategic objectives may be translated into operational activities through an integrated management system.

The findings also confirm observations made in the Polish literature, where issues such as New Public Management, Lean Healthcare, knowledge management or quality improvement are usually analysed separately (Frączkiewicz-Wronka, Austen, 2011; Klich, 2014; Korczak, 2018; Rydlewska-Liszkowska, 2015). The proposed model attempts to integrate these perspectives within one coherent theoretical framework.

7. Conclusions and implications

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the integration of management systems is one of the key directions of development for modern healthcare organizations. An integrated management system enables the streamlining and standardization of processes, reduction of duplication of activities, and increased operational efficiency of healthcare entities. Based on this, the following conclusions can be drawn from this study:

- an integrated management system should be treated as a tool for implementing a strategy, not merely a set of standards and procedures,
- the integration of processes, resources, and goals promotes improved quality and safety of healthcare,
- a lack of a coherent approach to system integration leads to inefficiency and excessive organizational burden,
- the effectiveness of implementing an integrated management system depends on organizational factors, including organizational culture, competencies, and information systems.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that the integration process is associated with numerous challenges, such as resource constraints, regulatory complexity, and the need to coordinate multiple stakeholders. Despite these difficulties, the benefits of implementing an integrated management system, including, in particular, improved service quality, operational efficiency, and risk reduction, justify further action in this direction.

Consequently, it is justified to conduct further empirical research on the level of integration of management systems in healthcare entities and to develop universal implementation models that could support management practice in healthcare.

Despite its theoretical contribution, the study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the proposed model has a conceptual character and has not yet been empirically validated in healthcare organizations. Second, the literature review, although structured and comprehensive, was limited to publications considered the most relevant to the research objective and therefore may not encompass all perspectives reported in the international literature. Third, the analysis was conducted primarily from the perspective of healthcare management systems and did not address detailed organizational differences

between various types of healthcare providers. Nevertheless, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by integrating previously dispersed research streams concerning strategic management, integrated management systems, quality management, and healthcare management into one coherent conceptual framework. The proposed model extends previous studies by conceptualising the integrated management system as a strategy implementation mechanism rather than solely as an operational management tool. This perspective may support both future empirical research aimed at validating the proposed relationships and practical applications in healthcare organizations seeking to align strategic objectives with management processes. Consequently, the model may serve as a theoretical foundation for developing implementation frameworks, performance measurement systems, and maturity assessment models supporting integrated healthcare management.

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