Qualitative Research Methodologies

The analysis of healthcare systems and their ideologies requires qualitative research strategies because of increasing system complexity and high rates of social, cultural and technological change. First, case analysis facilitates validation of patterns identified in data collected from diverse sources and construction of comparative frameworks from such grounded theory patterns as illustrated in the comparison of the NHS and Kaiser Permanente (Figure 2) [5, 6]. Historical analysis exposes the logic of system evolution, as in the phases of system creation through integration and horizontal coordination [7, 8]. Another promising approach is the sociometric analysis of virtual infrastructures on the Internet and their contribution to healthcare service markets and institutional networks as shown in analysis of the Cuban National Healthcare System (Figure 3) [1], [2], [8]. Little research has considered the effects of telecommunications and global healthcare ideologies and market dynamics [3]. The premise of this presentation is that study of configurations of virtual healthcare system infrastructures on the Internet and their contribution to healthcare service markets and institutional networks as shown in analysis of the Cuban National Healthcare System (Figure 3) [1], [2], [8]. Network configurations arising from these properties reflect institutional patterns of information management and control, including free market and centralized social medicine. For example, density or connectedness may describe the number or proportion of possible linkages appearing in a network, while hierarchy or dominance describes the distribution of linkages throughout the network. Configurations identified may be interpreted within Web sites, within particular healthcare systems, and at the interface between complex systems and the Internet. Taken together, case analysis, grounded theory, and sociometry offer methodological strategies to approach study of the important coherence between ideologies such as those represented in Figure 1 and virtual healthcare system infrastructures.

Conclusion

Qualitative research methodologies contribute to a rich understanding of the behavioral dimensions shaping virtual healthcare infrastructures and their ideological foundations. Such understanding is essential to the integrating role of medical informatics in diverse global healthcare services markets.