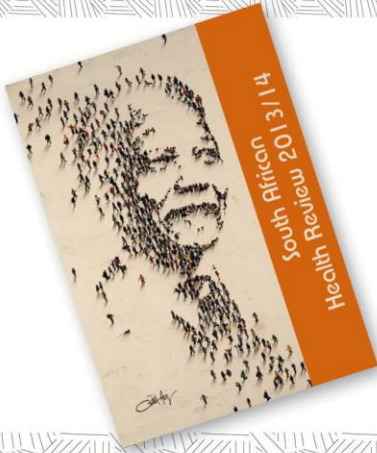




HEALTH SYSTEMS TRUST



CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS AT DISTRICT MANAGEMENT LEVEL

SAHR KWIK SKWIZ SERIES

This KWIK SKWIZ:



summarises Chapter 8 of the 2013/14 South African Health Review.

- South Africa's District Health System (DHS) is the organisational entity around and through which the provision of healthcare delivery should be organised as mandated by the National Health Act (61 of 2003).
- The DHS is structured to address the need to reorganise the country's inherited, highly fragmented healthcare delivery system into a unified one managed by District Management Teams (DMTs) with a focus on primary health care (PHC), and in line with an overarching government policy of decentralising government services.
- The current design of South Africa's healthcare system creates a situation wherein the success or failure of healthcare reforms will largely revolve around the strengths and weaknesses of district management. It is critical to ensure that district management has the delegated authority, competency and resources to implement national policy and strategy. If these institutional design issues are addressed, DMTs can be held fully accountable for the success or failure of service delivery at local level.
- Interviews were held with a sample of district managers representing a cross-section of urban and rural districts to understand the current challenges they face. PEPFAR Technical Assistance partners were surveyed on their impressions relating to the constraints and challenges faced by DMTs. This approach provided a snapshot of 25 districts covering all provinces. The most common issues hindering the DMTs in delivering high-quality healthcare services in a number of selected districts were explored.
- Among the key constraints and challenges identified are those that hamper DMTs in effectively translating national policy into district-specific strategies, comprehensive work plans and well-constructed budgets, linked to reliable management information systems that provide regular overview of progress.
- The district managers described health workforce issues as one of the major constraints undermining service delivery. Challenges predominantly revolve around key issues of workforce planning, recruitment and retention, thus depriving the DHS of sufficient dedicated human resources for implementation.

- Many DMTs concede that managers do not consistently and effectively use data for evidence-based decision-making, particularly with regard to planning and performance management. Although there are routine reports and datasets to promote information use, continued poor performance against key health service delivery indicators and gaps in adequate resource allocation highlight more systemic problems within the information building block for health systems strengthening.
- Pharmaceutical managers are seldom involved in item forecasting or budgeting exercises, and this creates discrepancies between procurement and actual need.
- District managers felt they had minimal actual control over their budgets, as decisions regarding budget allocation are made by Provincial Treasury. Budget allocations are insufficient to implement the annually developed District Health Plans, especially as new strategic objectives with additional service delivery requirements are introduced by the National Department of Health on a regular basis.
- District managers often lack the required managerial competencies to fulfil their leadership roles. Recruitment of healthcare managers at all levels in the district seldom includes formal training.

SOURCE:

Wolvaardt G, Johnson S, Cameron D, Botha B, Kornik S. Challenges and constraints at district management level. In Padarath A, English R, editors. South African Health Review 2013/14. Durban: Health Systems Trust; 2014.

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