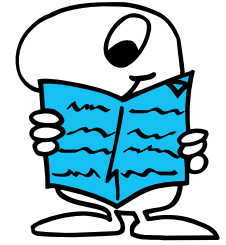


Initiative for Sub-District Support



Kwik-Skwiz #6

TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT:

A key component of effective health care

File for quick reference

The issue

Transport is not only an expensive resource, but is also critical to effective health care delivery. A lack of transport and the poor use of existing vehicles can lead to problems such as poor supplies of drugs to clinics, inadequate supervision of clinic staff, difficulties in referring patients between facilities, infrequent visits to schools by the school health team, and a lack of community outreach health services or mobile clinic services.

The ISDS experience suggests that it is imperative for district health services to focus on developing good management for transport. It is one of the most important functions of a district health management team (DHMT), and adequate time must be spent improving performance and educating users.

**Poor transport management
→ Poor health care delivery**

The root of transport problems

The transport problems of a health district may be the result of:

- ❖ poor coordination of transport - different facilities and authorities within a district having control of their own vehicles, resulting in inefficient planning;
- ❖ a lack of vehicles - especially in rural areas where health services are under-resourced, the roads are bad and the population is widely dispersed;
- ❖ theft, indiscipline, drunk driving and the abuse of government vehicles; and
- ❖ the poor maintenance and repair of vehicles.

District-based transport management

One advantage of the district health system is that it helps to bring together *all* the available resources within a well-defined geographical area, so that they can be used in a way that will make the biggest impact on health care. One of the first tasks for any newly established health district should therefore be to develop a system for coordinated planning, use and maintenance of *all* the available vehicles in the district.

In some health districts all vehicles may be under the single authority of the provincial Department of Health, which makes things much easier. In some districts, vehicle management and control will be fragmented - for example, some vehicles may be controlled by the district office, some by local authorities, some by hospitals and some by an independent ambulance service. However, it will *always* be possible to develop a coordinated district transport management system that will pool all the vehicles within a district, so that there can be co-ordinated planning and more efficient use of vehicles by sharing tasks and trips.

An important requirement for developing a district transport management system is therefore the establishment of a DHMT, an interim DHMT *or* (in districts where health services are still fragmented), a district-based co-ordinating team where the different authorities within a district can come together to discuss collaboration and joint planning.

Developing a district-based transport management system

Step 1: Conduct a rapid situation analysis of transport in the district

The first step in resolving any problem is to describe and analyse the current situation. This means finding out about the existing transport resources, identifying un-met transport needs, and pinpointing other transport problems in the district. Find out how health workers make transport requests, and how vehicles are allocated. Describe how vehicles are controlled: is there a person in charge of regulating the use of vehicles, and is this person able to prevent the abuse of vehicles?

Conduct an inventory of all vehicles in the district, and document what these vehicles are used for, their mileage and whether they are in a good state of repair. Describe and assess the procedure for the maintenance and repair of vehicles.

Step 2: Develop a district “transport task team”

The situation analysis should be conducted by a “team” of senior district personnel representing the various authorities and institutions that control vehicles, the users of transport and the drivers. The team should include senior personnel because they will continue to work together to develop the district’s transport policy and management system.

Step 3: Identify a district transport officer

One of the first tasks of the task team is to identify a person within the district to be responsible for overall co-ordination and day-to-day management of vehicles. The Transport Officer may be a senior person who is part of the DHMT, but should be someone who is able to devote at least half his or her time to running transport. Ideally, the Transport Officer will have some previous transport experience, but must be able to undertake administrative and analytical tasks, be able to manage drivers fairly and firmly, be senior enough not to be intimidated by the transport users, and have some background knowledge of the delivery of health services.

Depending on how the district is composed and structured, there may need to be assistant transport officers based at each institution at which vehicles are kept. For example, in the Mount Frere health district of the Eastern Cape, vehicles are divided up and spread between the two hospitals. In the Tsepho district of the Free State, vehicles are spread between the Department of Health and seven different local authorities.

Step 4: Establish the concept and idea of a district-based vehicle pool

It is critical that from the very beginning, all the various stakeholders and authorities within the district understand the purpose and need for the co-ordinated planning and management of vehicles. The idea of the exercise is so that vehicles based in the district are not allocated to specific authorities or institutions, but *belong to the district as a whole*. Although vehicles that are normally used by specific institutions or authorities can continue to be based at those locations, the vehicles should be used in a way that serves the needs of the district *as a whole*.

Step 5: Develop transport policies for the district

Appropriate local transport policy is one of the keys to successful transport management. As the transport task team conducts its situation analysis and begins to co-ordinate vehicle transport planning and management, it should develop the rules and guidelines for transport control and use. These should be based on provincial transport policy, but there will have to be detailed operational policies and guidelines which are based on the local situation and specifics of each individual district.

Policy areas should include:

- ❖ determining who in the district is allowed to request the use of vehicles, and who is responsible for signing trip authorities (see Box 1);
- ❖ clarifying the roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability of all those involved in transport management and use (see Box 2);
- ❖ the mechanism and procedure for the issuing of vehicles; and
- ❖ what should happen to drivers and transport users who continually return vehicles late, or who persistently fail to keep to their schedules.

Box 1: Determining who is authorised to request vehicles and sign trip authorities

There should be a clear identification of people within the district who have the authority to make transport requests or sign trip authorities. These people will include the members of the DHMT, programme managers, and facility managers. All health workers and services should have a clear channel of communication through which they can access transport.

Step 6: Develop an appropriate information system for transport management

Good quality information is the key to effective transport management. The transport management system is based on regularly filling out a number of forms for collecting this information. These forms include:

- ❖ the vehicle logsheet or logbook (which should be completed by the driver for each trip taken);
- ❖ vehicle issue and return forms which are completed when vehicles are issued out by and returned to the transport officer (recording the condition of the vehicle, quantity of fuel in the tank, log book and petrol card numbers); and
- ❖ monthly vehicle report forms which summarises the use and performance of each vehicle for the preceding month, including information related to accidents and maintenance, service or repairs.

In addition, a file should be opened for each vehicle. The file should contain the vehicle registration document, the completed monthly report forms, completed vehicle log sheets, and any other correspondence relating to that vehicle.

Step 7: Identify priority services that rely on regular transport

The DHMT should identify the basic priority health activities and services that should be regularly and routinely allocated a vehicle. This should include the regular allocation of a vehicle for:

- ❖ the supply of drugs, equipment and sundries to clinics (for example, at least once a week there will be a vehicle routinely visiting each clinic in the district);
- ❖ the support and supervision of clinics;
- ❖ mobile clinic services;

Box 2: The roles and responsibilities of relevant persons in the district

Different people in the district have different roles to play in ensuring effective district transport management:

Roles and responsibilities of the DHMT:

- ❖ develop transport policies for the district;
- ❖ supervise and support all the responsibilities of the district transport officer;
- ❖ ensure that vehicles are allocated according to the delivery of priority health services and the district health plan;
- ❖ monitor overall performance and identify areas for improvement; and
- ❖ identify the overall transport needs of the district and budget for transport operation.

Roles and responsibilities of the District Transport Officer:

- ❖ the day-to-day management of vehicles;
- ❖ keep an up-to-date inventory of vehicles and ensure proper record keeping;
- ❖ prepare weekly and monthly vehicle itineraries based on transport requests;
- ❖ monitor vehicle performance;
- ❖ ensure that vehicle maintenance schedules are kept and that vehicles are properly looked after;
- ❖ ensure the presence of all loose vehicle equipment such as the spare wheel, toolkit and jack, when the vehicle is issued out and returned;
- ❖ ensure the safe and legal operation of all vehicles; and
- ❖ provide the DHMT with reports and information on overall performance and transport-related problems.

Roles and responsibilities of the driver:

- ❖ ensure the safe and legal operation of the vehicle;
- ❖ report any faults and maintenance requirements to the transport officer;
- ❖ carry out daily and weekly vehicle safety checks;
- ❖ take responsibility for the log book, keys, petrol card and fuel receipts once the vehicle is issued out; and
- ❖ complete the vehicle logsheet fully for every trip taken.

- ❖ school health services;
- ❖ environmental health officers and other community-based health workers; and
- ❖ the emergency transfer of patients to hospital (this is normally a fully-equipped ambulance, but in some areas, the “ambulance” is nothing more than an ordinary bakkie that is also used for other activities).

Step 8: Develop a system for making a monthly transport schedule

Before the beginning of each month, a monthly transport schedule should be drawn up by the district transport officer. This will show the allocation of vehicles to those activities and services mentioned in Step 7, as well as the allocation of vehicles to other activities.

Therefore, by the 25th of each month, all requests for planned trips in the following month should be submitted to the transport officer. These requests should include the number of people and places to be visited, and whether the dates are fixed or flexible. It is important that dates are kept as flexible as possible so that different trips can be combined, but without making wide detours.

As there are no individually-allocated vehicles, no one can assume that there will always be a vehicle available. All potential transport users will quickly learn the importance of planning their transport needs ahead of time and preparing a travel itinerary.

Once the monthly transport schedule has been completed, a copy should be issued to the district manager, and displayed in the transport office and other major insitutions of the district.

Step 9: Develop a system for handling unplanned transport requests

Not all trips can be planned a month before. Other transport requests should therefore be made through a transport request form as soon as the need for a vehicle becomes known.

Therefore, on each Thursday, the transport officer should prepare a more detailed weekly plan for vehicles

for the week ahead. This will be based on the monthly schedule but will be updated daily to include any new requests for transport or any changes. *It should be possible to determine the location of all vehicles at any time by looking at this form.*

If there are insufficient vehicles to meet the planned programmes, or an emergency should arise, then the district manager or designated person should assign priorities. *Vehicle allocation should be determined according to the health care priorities of the district, and should not to be issued according to seniority or rank.*

Copies of these updated weekly transport schedules must also be issued to the district manager, and displayed in the transport office and other major insitutions of the district.

Step 10: Develop a system for monitoring performance

At the end of each month, the transport officer should review the allocation of vehicles in the past month and note any failures and problem areas. He or she should keep records on the number of transport requests that were made, and how many of them were satisfied. Major problems should be brought to the attention of the DHMT.

Various transport efficiency indicators can be calculated from the data collected from the vehicle log sheets to help assess performance and efficiency. These include:

- ❖ kilometres travelled per litre of fuel (fuel utilisation)
- ❖ maintenance costs per vehicle per year
- ❖ running cost per kilometre (fuel plus maintenance)

The calculation of these factors will aid the preparation of budgets for future years and the identification of uneconomic vehicles. ■

Compiled by David McCoy. Acknowledgements: Northern Cape Provincial Transport Management Handbook [prepared in conjunction with Save the Children Fund (UK) and Sarah Nancolles].

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