

Expanding Family Planning through Community Health Workers within the Christian Health Association of Kenya

CHWs IN KENYA

In spite of significant efforts from the Ministry of Health (MOH), NGOs and the international donor community, Kenya continues to suffer from poor health indicators and is not on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Kenya, like many other African countries, is experiencing a shortage of health workers to address the population's needs. As a result, Kenya's National Health Sector Strategic Plan proposes equipping community health workers (CHWs) to deliver health promotion and basic services. This community strategy was outlined in 2006, and the MOH is currently developing a curriculum for CHWs.

CHWs are an important cadre of health workers who provide the first line of defense against disease, injury, and other poor health outcomes. Since the 1980's CHWs have played an important role in the

provision of healthcare in Kenya, but their capacity to engage in family planning activities has been limited over the past two decades due to reductions in funding and priority shifts from broader reproductive health concerns to HIV/AIDS.

Equipping CHWs to provide family planning is an evidence-based and effective approach to improving the health of women, children and communities. Training, equipping, and supporting CHWs to provide a wide range of family planning methods is a proven High Impact Practice (HIP)ⁱ according to USAID. In addition to pills and condoms, CHWs can safely and effectively provide the Standard Days Method[®] (SDM), the Lactational Amenorrhea Method (LAM), emergency contraception, and injectables. In keeping with this evidence, the MOH in Kenya has included family planning in their national strategy for community-based healthcare.

Our dream for families in Africa:

That family planning will become a right for every woman and family;

That family planning will cease to be restricted to hospitals (where it is offered as medical treatment), but instead will be transformed into an opportunity for family centered health care; and

That family planning education and options will become easily accessible through a community-based system.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Recognizing the potential CHWs have in improving family planning in Kenya, the Christian Health Association of Kenya (CHAK) and the Institute for Reproductive Health (IRH) at Georgetown University implemented a capacity building strategy to strengthen the provision of family planning methods through faith-based health facilities, with a specific focus on community-based family planning provision.

This project, funded by the World Bank, targets the training of community-health workers in CHAK's network to provide



women of reproductive age with four family planning methods (pills, condoms, SDM, and LAM) and referrals to CHAK facilities for others. Facility-based providers are equipped to support CHWs through supportive supervision activities. In addition to building the capacity of CHAK health providers, the project seeks to increase the commitment of religious and community leaders to mobilize demand for family planning as well as strengthen linkages between CHAK and the national family planning program.

CHW counseling tool

The capacity building strategy draws on the new World Health Organization (WHO) tool, *A guide to family planning for health workers and their clients*, which IRH has adapted for the Kenyan context. This tool is based on the WHO Medical Eligibility Criteria and is able to provide all the essential family planning information in a simple and concise manner through a flipchart. The tool helps providers convey key messages to clients such as the benefits of family planning, the importance of informed choice, and what changes to expect with method use. The evidence-based information assists providers in counseling clients on choosing the most appropriate method based on the client's fertility intentions, physical health, and other socio-cultural circumstances.

Training

Using this tool, IRH developed a full training curriculum for community-based family planning provision of pills, condoms, SDM, and LAM as well as referrals for other locally available methods. The curriculum gives particular attention to the importance of supportive supervision for community health workers.

Supportive Supervision

CHWs are supported by supervisors at the dispensary level. Supervisors facilitate

monthly meetings, in which progress is reviewed, commodity logs are compiled, and refresher training is provided as needed. The contraceptive supply for CHWs is managed by CHAK facilities who acquire their supplies from the MOH. A national family planning advisor from CHAK works closely with the supervisors to maintain high quality training and supervision to providers at the dispensary level. Dispensary staff are expected to train and supervise other CHWs in their catchment area.

Evaluation

CHAK and IRH reviewed this approach to address such questions as the value of the counseling tool for CHWs, the effectiveness of the training approach, the feasibility of supportive supervision activities, and the effect of commodity availability on service provision. Data sources used for the evaluation were service statistics, supervision visit reports, and results from the Knowledge Improvement Tool (KIT)ⁱⁱ.

CONCLUSION

Results from this pilot project indicate CHWs in CHAK's network are willing and capable to provide family planning in a manner aligned with international best practices. Their strong community ties offer important opportunities for information dissemination, behavior change, and service provision at the community level.

Future efforts to expand family planning in Kenya should:

- Include faith-based health networks as partners in family planning programs; and
- Improve coordination between faith-based health networks and MOH to ensure local buy-in and commodity security.



ⁱ HIPs are a selection of evidence-based practices determined by USAID to be interventions that when scaled up and institutionalized, will maximize investments in a comprehensive family planning strategy. www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/pop/publications/docs/high_impact_practices.pdf

ⁱⁱ The KIT is a monitoring and evaluation tool developed by IRH to measure the counseling skills of health providers.