

Challenges of Outreach Team Leaders in Managing Ward Based Primary Health Care Outreach Teams in National Health Insurance Pilot Districts in Kwazulu-Natal

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Abstract : In 2010, South Africa's National Department of Health (NDoH) launched national primary health care (PHC) initiative to strengthen health promotion, disease prevention, and early disease detection. The strategy, called Re-engineering Primary Health Care (rPHC), aims to support a preventive and health-promoting community-based PHC model by using community-based outreach teams (known in South Africa as Ward-based Primary Health Care Outreach teams or WBPHCOTs). These teams provide health education, promote healthy behaviors, assess community health needs, manage minor health problems, and support linkages to health services and health facilities. Ward based primary health care outreach teams are supervised by a professional nurse who is the outreach team leader. In South Africa, the WBPHCOTs have been established, registered, and are reporting their activities in the District Health Information System (DHIS). This study explored and described the challenges faced by outreach team leaders in supporting and supervising the WBPHCOTs. Qualitative data were obtained through interviews conducted with the outreach team leaders at a sub-district level. Thematic analysis of data was done. Findings revealed some challenges faced by team leaders in day to day execution of their duties. Issues such as staff shortages, inadequate resources to carry out health promotion activities, and lack of co-operation from team members may undermine the capacity of team leaders to support and supervise the WBPHCOTs. Many community members are under the impression that the outreach team is responsible for bringing the clinic to the community while the outreach teams do not carry any medication/treatment with them when doing home visits. The study further highlights issues around the challenges of WBPHCOTs at a household level. In conclusion, the WBPHCOTs are an important component of National Health Insurance (NHI), and in order for NHI to be optimally implemented, the issues raised in this research should be addressed with some urgency.

Keywords : community health worker, national health insurance, primary health care, ward-based primary health care outreach teams

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