

Strengthening Functional Community-Provider Linkages: Lessons from the Challenge Initiative for Healthy Cities Program in Indore, India

Authors : Sabyasachi Behera, Shiv Kumar, Pramod Gautam, Anisur Rahman, Pawan Pathak, Rahul Bhadouria

Abstract : Background: The increasing proportion of population especially urban poor and vulnerable groups or groups with specific needs, with health indicators worse than their rural counterparts in India face various issues related with availability and quality of health care. The reasons are myriad, starting from information and awareness of the community, especially, in a scenario wherein the needs and challenges of floating and migrant urban populations remain poorly understood. Weak linkages between health care facilities and slum dwellers and vulnerable populations hinder the improvement of health services for urban poor. Method: To address this issue, TCIHC program is helping health department of Indore city of Madhya Pradesh to establish a referral mechanism with a dual approach: at both community and facility level. The former is based on the premise of 'building social capital', i.e. norms and networks within a community facilitating collective action, helps improve the demand and supply of health services at appropriate levels of care (Minus 2: Accredited Social Health Activist and Community Health Groups; Minus 1: Urban Health Nutrition Days; Zero: Urban Primary Health Center; Plus 1: secondary facility with BEmONC services; Plus 2: secondary facilities with CEmONC services; Plus 3: tertiary level facility) for the urban poor. The latter focuses on encouraging the provision of all services at various levels of service delivery points and stakeholders to function in a coordinated manner to ensure better health service availability and coverage in underserved slum areas. Results: This initiative has enhanced the utilization of community based, primary and secondary level services through defined referral pathways that are clearly known to a community dweller. Conclusion: An ideal referral mechanism should begin with referral at the community level wherein services of a frontline health care provider are accessed by them at their door-step, causing no delay in both understanding and decision on the health issues faced by them.

Keywords : levels of care, linkages, referral mechanism, service delivery

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