The World Health Report 2000 - 'Health systems: improving performance' - stressed the importance of health systems being more outcomes oriented (10). This requires asking questions that link the use of resources to the desired intrinsic or intermediate goals of the system. It calls on governments to engage in active assessment of the performance of health systems and the functions that contribute to the accomplishment of the goals. WHO is working to develop a parsimonious set of indicators aimed at better monitoring of health systems performance. The important part of this process is to begin to get evidence, so the decisions on health systems are scientifically sound.

This publication distils experience on how to assemble data, collect information and carry out the analysis and synthesis that links the use of human resources to health activities and outcomes. It is intended to enable health managers and policy-makers to evaluate the costs and benefits of human resource performance indicators and decide whether and how to use them.

WHO supports this direction as a contribution to the greater accountability of health systems.

Orvill Adams
Director
Department of Health Service Provision
World Health Organization

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The use of performance indicators is well established in many developed countries, but, at the time of the project work from which this manual is derived, there had been little exploration of the use of indicators in developing health systems other than for monitoring clinical performance. This was despite increasing interest and attention on organizational efficiency and effectiveness by many Ministries of Health.

In all discussions of health service performance, the impact of the workforce is generally seen to be of paramount importance. For this reason, we felt that the development of a core set of indicators appropriate to developing health systems should be based on a foundation of measures concerning the effective and efficient mobilization of the workforce. This forms the framework of this manual.

The authors have experience as both users and developers of performance indicators within the UK National Health Service. As a consequence, they are aware of the potential contributions to improved management arising from their use and, at the same time, the issues they pose in their application for managers, practitioners and patients. We hope this manual will provide further stimulus to introducing performance indicators as a tool for enhancing the provision of health care.

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