Monitoring and supervision of medicines management and related pharmaceutical activities in Ghana

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Monitoring and supervision of medicines management and other related pharmaceutical services in the public sector in Ghana are usually carried out by the Chief Pharmacist’s Office, which is based at the Ghana Health Service/Ministry of Health Headquarters in Accra, the capital. Other monitoring and supervisory activities in the pharmaceutical sub-sector also take place at regional and district levels. At regional and district levels the offices of the Regional Deputy Director of Pharmaceutical Services and the District Pharmacist respectively, exercise over-sight responsibility for pharmaceutical services.

A monitoring checklist based on WHO guidelines has been carefully developed to suit our needs. This checklist, which is the main instrument for monitoring and supervision, is periodically (usually annually) updated to ensure that it covers current medicines management issues.

There are 10 administrative regions in Ghana and these have been re-grouped into four zones for effective and efficient monitoring purposes. The Monitoring Team from the Chief Pharmacist’s Office tries to visit each zone during one quarter of the year to carry out monitoring and supervision. The team is usually made up of three technical officers and a driver. The total cost per visit to a zone is usually...
about US$2300 or less depending on the length of stay, which is a maximum of 14 days.

During each visit between 14-18 health facilities are usually sampled and assessed, based on the following criteria:-

- procurement and distribution of essential medicines
- storage facilities for essential medicines and other related health supplies
- stock control
- quality assurance measures in place
- medicines availability and accessibility (including vital vaccines and sera)
- rational use of medicines
- record-keeping and reports submission
- medicines pricing
- in-house manufacture of medicines.

During subsequent visits to the same zone, different health facilities are usually sampled to ensure that the monitoring and supervision exercises eventually cover all service delivery points in the country.

To make the exercise more relevant, the team focuses on the medicines that are usually used for the management of the 10 top causes of out-patient attendances. Fifty-nine and 41 tracer medicines were carefully selected for the regional/district and the health centre levels respectively. Specialized and teaching hospitals are handled separately from these zonal visits.

After data collection, a draft report is generated by the Monitoring Team and the Regional Health Authorities are briefed on the findings so that immediate interventions can be made to address very urgent issues. A detailed report is prepared later, on return to headquarters and disseminated to all the appropriate authorities - the Director-General, Ghana Health Service, Director, Policy, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, Director, Procurement and Supplies (Ministry of Health), Director, Institutional Care Division, Ghana Health Service etc.

Issues arising from the report which might require headquarters’ intervention are discussed at the weekly Directors Meeting and the necessary remedial actions are taken as quickly as possible.

Apart from the monitoring and technical support visits to the designated zones by the Monitoring Team from the Chief Pharmacist’s Office, the Regional Deputy Directors of Pharmaceutical Services submit monthly returns on all 59 tracer medicines for regional/district hospitals and the 41 tracer medicines for health centres. The report is generally based on availability, shelf-life and prices. In addition, quarterly returns on the status all medicines being held at each of the Regional Medical Stores are submitted to the Chief Pharmacist’s Office for assessment and feedback if necessary.

This combination of technical support visits and the periodic submission of returns on the use of essential medicines means that we are able to keep track of medicines availability and accessibility at the user points throughout the country all year round.

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