Technical Working Group #7: Improving health worker productivity and performance in the context of universal health coverage: the roles of standards, quality improvement, and regulation

Summary
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Synthesis of Key Messages

Improving health workers’ performance and productivity is vital to improving health care delivery in fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals, and commitments, policies, and actions beyond 2015. The evolving momentum for Universal Health Coverage (UHC) offers an important opportunity to look at human resources for health (HRH) challenges in the context of UHC. During the last decade, numerous intergovernmental resolutions as well as action plans have highlighted the importance of HRH investments. However, policy makers and program planners still struggle to determine the correct set of actions to improve worker performance and productivity.

Critical human resources shortages, particularly in low-resource settings, require that we not only develop long-term strategies for increased production and retention of health workers but more importantly that we strengthen the productivity and performance of the workforce we have in order to get the best possible results and the highest impact with existing resources.

This paper highlights the theme of the roles of standards, quality improvement, and regulation for improving health worker productivity and performance in the context of UHC. A framework was developed, based on findings from existing research, which shows that determinants of health workers' performance and productivity are rooted in factors related to: 1) the macro, or overall health systems, socio-economic/labor market, and political level; 2) the micro level, such as the workplace itself or the communities in which health workers live; and 3) the individual characteristics of health workers themselves. HRH interventions including standards of health care, quality improvement and regulation (inputs and processes) work in a dynamic relationship with each other to improve health worker performance and productivity.

The paper provides specific recommendations, while not exhaustive in the factors influencing health worker productivity and performance, which can contribute to a post-2015 strategy on HRH. These include:

Recommendation 1 (Standards): Conduct further research to test locally appropriate and sustainable strategies for helping healthcare providers perform according to evidence-based standards in diverse conditions; continually improve tools and processes to help health providers know about evidence-based standards and apply them in their daily work.

Recommendation 2 (Quality improvement): Conduct further research and share results on the effect of quality improvement approaches as a core strategy for better healthcare and health workforce performance and productivity.

Recommendation 3 (Regulation): Adopt a systems based approach to develop and implement contemporary regulatory structures and processes that align with changing health, education, and social needs.