



Task Shifting: Field Officers in Uganda

Context

Uganda has approximately 530,000 people infected with HIV, and 110,000 of them need antiretroviral therapy (ART). Almost nine out of ten people infected with HIV live in rural communities in extreme poverty. The poor health care infrastructure in rural areas, shortages of health workers and their inequitable deployment render traditional delivery of services inadequate for this population

The Practice

To meet this challenge, a Ugandan NGO, the AIDS Support Organization (TASO), administers a home-based program that gives people in rural settings access to ART and services. TASO recognizes that shortages of skilled health professionals in Uganda constrain the effective delivery and expansion of services, especially to the poor. As part of its innovative approach to providing ART, TASO shifts delivery of most clients' follow-up activities at home to field officers, a new cadre of degree and diploma holders from the social sciences and education. Field officers ensure adherence to ART, refill clients' medicines and perform various activities, from voluntary counseling and testing to education to promoting family and community support. This new cadre meets the high standards demanded by this kind of program while also freeing skilled health professionals to care for clients affected by opportunistic infections or drug toxicity.

To support its field officers, TASO has introduced a range of HR initiatives, including:

- A comprehensive human resources management system
- A recruitment and selection process that matches candidates against established criteria and according to human resources needs, including the gender profile of the client base
- An intensive and tailored training program for newly appointed field officers
- Targeted continuous professional development and in-service training upgrades to strengthen field officers' skills and knowledge
- Encouraging its staff to embrace values such as obligation to people living with HIV/AIDS, equal rights, shared responsibilities and equal opportunities, human dignity, family spirit and integrity.

Health Workforce Impact

TASO's staff retention strategy has been effective, shaped by its core values that help to motivate and retain field officers. By the end of 2005, eight of the 11 TASO centers were taking part in the ART Program. The program shows promising results: the mortality rate dropped from 490/1,000 per years of observation to 59/1,000 in one TASO center. TASO's ART program comprises almost 9% of Ugandans living with HIV/AIDS who are receiving ART, reaching adherence rates over 95% and reducing mortality by almost 90% among those in the program.



This summary brief is a component of a larger effort to document and disseminate four promising human resources for health practices from Africa. The brief is excerpted from Health Workforce Innovations: A Synthesis of Four Promising Practices (Buchan and McCaffery). The synthesis paper and a full report on this particular promising practice, Incorporating Lay Human Resources to Increase Accessibility to Antiretroviral Therapy: A Home-Based Approach in Uganda (Benavides and Caffrey), are available in the Publications and Resources section at www.capacityproject.org

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