

Improving Retention: Nurse Tutors in Malawi

Context

Retaining nurse tutors is imperative for Malawi's health care system as they are required to train nurse technicians, who deliver essential services primarily in rural and deprived areas. Failure to retain nurse tutors can only exacerbate shortages of nurse technicians, which reportedly exceed 80% in some districts. A scarcity of nurse tutors in the late 1990s brought several training institutions run by the Christian Health Association of Malawi (CHAM) to the verge of closing. Graduates of CHAM institutions represent 80–90% of the public and private auxiliary nurse workforce in rural areas.

The Practice

Malawi's Ministry of Health (MOH) has supported a range of initiatives to retain nurse tutors. The MOH instituted a salary supplement scheme in 1997 with funding from the Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation. This incentive program has its strengths and weaknesses, but has ultimately been deemed successful in attracting and retaining nurse tutors, particularly since 2002, building on additional support from the German Technical Cooperation.

The main elements of the incentive program are:

- Salary supplements
- Free staff housing
- Obligation to serve for a period of time in return for educational scholarships (bonding).

Some training institutions have offered additional incentives such as bonus salary supplements, transportation to work for commuting staff, transportation for home visits, training and educational opportunities and free utilities. Other factors identified as assisting to attract and retain tutors are proximity of work to home and family and promotions within institutions.

A key element in the program's success has been a public-private partnership through which government health workers are assigned to private, faith-based training institutions. This partnership helped attract faith-based donors for infrastructure development programs in many of the CHAM institutions to improve and expand training facilities and staff and student accommodations.

Health Workforce Impact

As a result of these interventions, all nurse training institutions have remained open since 2000. The number of nurse tutor and clinical instructor posts has increased and remains relatively stable. In 2000 there were 39 tutors and 12 assistant tutors; as of September 2005 there were 71 tutors and 22 assistant tutors across the ten nurse technician training institutions operated by members of CHAM.



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, Attracting and Retaining Nurse Tutors in Malawi (Caffrey and Frelick), are available in the Publications and Resources section at www.capacityproject.org

The Capacity Project Partnership

IntraHealth International, Interchurch Medical Assistance (IMA), JHPIEGO, Liverpool Associates in Tropical Health (LATH), Management Sciences for Health (MSH), PATH, Training Resources Group, Inc. (TRG)