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MANI Learning Series

HEALTH SYSTEMS STORY

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Strengthening Health Management Information Systems to Improve Performance: Spotlight on Kaptanai Dispensary

Why is the HMIS Important?

Successful health service managers rely on access to accurate and timely information to make good decisions. The performance of the health system in Kenya is notoriously affected by poor quality data and limited access to information at all levels: data in paper-based registers is incomplete and doesn't make its way to users efficiently. Health workers who are responsible for data entry rarely receive feedback on their work and are not aware of changes that could be made.

The MANI project is supporting 129 health facilities in the six sub-counties in Bungoma to strengthen their Health Management Information Systems (HMIS) to enable them to deliver high quality services.

The story of Kaptanai Dispensary, Sirisia Sub-county

Kaptanai Dispensary is a rural facility located in the foothills of Mount Elgon. It offers a range of health services including routine deliveries. The Dispensary is staffed by six health workers and serves a catchment population of roughly 13,500 people.

When the MANI project supported its first data quality assessment at the dispensary in 2015, the facility scored poorly: there was data missing from some of the registers, and erroneous reporting in some places. The data available showed a poor understanding of the routine indicators for maternal and newborn health. For these and other reasons, most information available was not being used to inform decision-making.

Facility Nursing Officer

"We were not very sure about the meaning of indicators in the registers and ended up leaving them blank. When they were clarified by the Sub-county and project teams visiting us, we are now fully able to fill the registers correctly and report in time."

Sub-county Health Records and Information Officer

"Every time you meet [the Kaptanai Dispensary staff] in meetings or in the health facility, they always want to know more. This commitment has contributed to Kaptanai becoming the most improved facility in data issues".

Data demand and information use have subsequently increased, following the improved data quality. The facility team and management staff are better able to identify poorly performing indicators and gaps in service provision, and as a team, develop appropriate action plans for improvement.

Data quality Assessment in Kaptanai Dispensary (facility staff supported by sub-county Ministry of Health staff and MANI staff)

Facility Clinical Officer In-charge

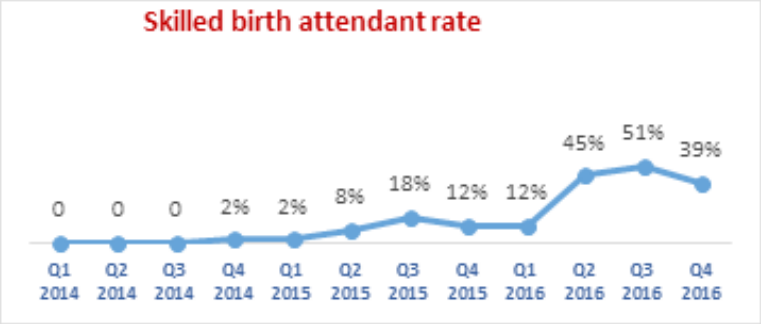
"We used to have incomplete registers, our reports never used to make sense and no differences could be observed. Now that we have correctly filled registers, we can make sense out of our data".

Use of services has increased markedly at the facility as a result of the management effort to use data for planning and decision making.

Facility Nursing Officer

"Register page summaries were never there but nowadays we understand the meaning of page summaries, and how they can help us compute our reports easily without wasting time. We can look at specific indicators in the page summaries to see what needs to be improved on; then we prioritise and put in more effort to improve our indicators. For example, we involved Community Health Volunteers and as a result we have gotten more referrals to the facility than before. This has improved our numbers".

The improved capacity of the HMIS, as well as other interventions supported by MANI in this facility is evidently bearing fruit. The skilled birth attendance rate has increased markedly through 2016, posting a 25% improvement in 2016 compared to 2015. Strong team work and the use of scorecards and dashboards have greatly improved the use of information at this facility. Similarly, breastfeeding within one hour of birth increased from 39% in Q3 of 2015 to 87% in Q3 of 2016.



Three year trends in skilled birth attendance rate, Kaptanai Dispensary

Lessons Learned

Although improvements have been seen in facilities such as Kaptanai Dispensary, some facilities still struggle to improve the quality and use of their data. Staff at Kaptanai Dispensary have identified the following key drivers of their success:

- **Data quality improves when health workers own their data.** All relevant staff must first understand the data and the indicators collected, and how to interpret and act on the information provided. The first audience for data use must be the data collectors themselves.
- **Regular and supportive facility visits by the sub-county team are essential.** When they visit, sub-county staff should be able to provide on-the-job training and guidance to health workers, clarifying things that are not understood and demonstrating ways to improve.
- **A team approach is essential for success.** Activities to strengthen the HMIS should be inclusive of departmental representatives. A responsible person should be identified to provide timely feedback and promote teamwork and the internal sharing of skills.
- **The process never stops.** A continuous cycle of data checking, identifying gaps and sharing lessons learned ensures that improvements are sustained. In the context of high staff turnover this can help ensure that new staff are kept informed and up to date.
- **Data that is packaged clearly is more likely to be used.** Efforts to improve data quality should go hand in hand with improvements in the interpretation and use of data to improve service delivery, for example through the use of dashboards and the presentation of data in a user-friendly manner.