

Standards-Based Management and Recognition:

A Process for Improving the Quality of Health Services



Photo by: Jhpiego/Malawi

Participants wearing t-shirts branded with the logo for the SBM-R infection prevention initiative in Malawi.

Using SBM-R to Improve Infection Prevention in Malawi

In collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Jhpiego has applied SBM-R to infection prevention and control practices in Malawi, with the goal of protecting clients and health workers from acquiring infections, especially blood-borne infections and TB. First implemented at seven hospitals in three regions, the initiative, called Ukhondo Ndi Moyo (“Hygiene Is Life”), has now been expanded to 30 hospitals nationwide. To date, seven hospitals have been recognized for meeting 80% of the performance standards and achieving excellence.

Health managers are continually striving to improve the performance and quality of health services. The results of quality improvement initiatives, however, have often been disappointing. Health workers may see these efforts as overly burdensome as they deal with new technologies and increasing client expectations about quality of care. Furthermore, in many countries, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is creating an additional strain on health services, often demoralizing and decimating the health workforce. Improving health care under these circumstances can be very difficult.

Building on our tradition of health care innovation, Jhpiego has pioneered a process designed to achieve meaningful improvements in health care. Over the last decade, we have developed and refined Standards-Based Management and Recognition (SBM-R), a practical management approach for improving the performance and quality of health services. It is a proactive approach, focusing not on problems but rather on the standardized level of performance and quality to be attained. SBM-R follows four basic steps:

- Setting performance standards that are constructed around clearly defined service delivery processes or a specific content area
- Implementing the standards in a streamlined, systematic way
- Measuring progress to guide the improvement process toward these standards
- Rewarding achievement of standards through recognition mechanisms

Field Experiences

Jhpiego’s field experiences with SBM-R began in 1997 in Brazil with the PROQUALI project, which focused on improving reproductive health care in 29 health care facilities in two states. Gradually, Jhpiego expanded SBM-R to 20 countries.

The SBM-R Process

SBM-R begins with the development of evidence-based, operational standards in a specific area of health service delivery, such as reproductive health or infection prevention. These performance standards show providers and managers, in detail, not only what to do but also how to do it. The standards are included in an assessment tool that can be used for self, peer, internal and external assessments at the facility level. Application of the assessment tool leads to the identification of performance gaps that should be reduced or eliminated. Local

SBM-R for Midwifery Education in Afghanistan

To address the severe shortage of trained midwives in Afghanistan, Jhpiego adapted SBM-R to a process for defining and achieving high-quality midwifery education. The Ministry of Public Health, Jhpiego and partners developed 59 educational standards and supported the establishment of a Midwifery Education Accreditation Board. The schools used the explicitly detailed standards to evaluate their performance, define their needs and mark their progress. The Board continues to oversee external evaluations and formal accreditation. Thus far, 13 of Afghanistan's 21 midwifery schools have achieved accreditation, and the remainder are continuing their process of performance improvement and anticipate accreditation soon. Our experience in Afghanistan has shown that SBM-R has the potential to substantially improve the quality and uniformity of midwifery education and is also applicable to the education of other health professionals.

health managers and providers can then analyze the causes of the gaps and identify and implement appropriate interventions to correct the lack of knowledge and skills, an inadequate enabling environment (including resources and policies), and/or lack of motivation to close these gaps.

When implementing SBM-R, local health workers are encouraged to focus on action and begin with simple interventions in order to achieve early results, create momentum for change and gradually acquire change management skills to address more complex gaps.

Partial improvements are rewarded during the process using a combination of measures including feedback and social recognition (e.g., ceremonies, symbolic rewards). The global achievement of compliance with standards by the facility is acknowledged through a recognition mechanism that should involve institutional authorities and the community.

Working closely with in-country partners, we have obtained very encouraging results in achieving standardized, high-quality health care through this approach. Results are best when SBM-R is coupled with creative management of the change process, and active involvement of providers, clients and communities in the improvement effort.

In 2005, Jhpiego published *Standards-Based Management and Recognition—A Field Guide: A Practical Approach for Improving the Performance and Quality of Health Services*. To accompany the manual, there is a Facilitator's Handbook CD-ROM, containing basic information and tools that managers, providers, advocacy groups and technical assistance organizations can use to improve the quality of health services.

Jhpiego's field experiences with SBM-R to date have shown that it is a simple, user-friendly method for improving services at the facility level. The successes of our programs in 11 countries have demonstrated that SBM-R can produce sustainable results and can be scaled up at the national level at a manageable cost.