

Title: The health system effects of task shifting for HIV in Burkina Faso

Background: At least 57 low and middle income countries (LMICs) are facing a critical shortage of health workforce, creating a major bottleneck for scaling up health services and achieving health systems goals. In order to address this shortage, many LMICs have been implementing various forms of task-shifting strategies. Task shifting has been widely used in Sub Saharan Africa, covering a variety of health services .While the impact of task shifting on quality of care and clinical outcomes have been demonstrated in several studies, evidence on its impact on the health system as a whole is limited. This study explored health system effects using task shifting for HIV in Burkina Faso as a case study.

Methods: We used a case study approach, using mixed qualitative and quantitative methods. Data sources included document reviews, and reviews of available data and records, as well as interviews with key informants and health workers.

Results: Our analysis highlighted the importance of differentiating between two types of system-level effects. The first are effects due to health system barriers, for example the unavailability of medicines and supplies, generating a series of effects on the various components of the health system. The second are effects inherent to task shifting itself, such as job satisfaction or better access to health services.

A wide range of effects was identified and discussed. Among the system-level effects that we found are positive, mostly unintended, effects and synergies such as increased health workers' sense of responsibility and worthiness, using the newly acquired skills in other non-HIV tasks, as well as improved patient-provider relationships. Among the negative unintended effects is staff frustration due to lack of medicines and supplies or lack of the necessary infrastructure to be able to perform the new tasks.

Conclusion: Finally, our study revealed several design and implementation issues that are preventing the strategy from achieving its full impact. This highlights the importance of systematically thinking through and anticipating these problems during the design and early implementation phases of the strategy. It also highlights the importance of political and financial commitments at the national level, to ensure the sustainability of the strategy and the achieved coverage levels.

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