

Introducing Simplified Registers to Community Health Officers

Prior to the introduction of MoTeCH, Community Health Officers (CHOs) were expected to record patient's clinical data in at least 12 separate register books, with some clinics exceeding even 20 registers. Mdm. Mercy Tidinchana, a CHO at the Kajelo Community Health Centre, when describing this process, explained, "you were writing it into so many books, and it would take a lot of time." On a monthly basis, CHOs are required to create routine cumulative reports from their collective registers. This process, with the older register system, required a tedious exercise of sifting and tallying back and forth through the various books. Mdm. Tidinchana revealed that oftentimes, because of complexity of that task, "we didn't get accurate reports at the end of the month," illuminating serious negative consequences on the quality of health data.



Mavis Amenga-Etego, a CHO from the Kassena Nankana East Health Centre, entering client data into a simplified register

The MoTeCH initiative understood these significant challenges and realized that comprehensive modifications of the register system were essential before the mobile phone component of the project could even be introduced. Beyond establishing this necessary platform for MoTeCH, the project was also interested in learning about the greater overall impact that more proficient and consolidated registers could have on the health system. Effects of interest included the report compilation process, the time available for patient-client encounters, worker productivity, and more general health outcomes.

The Simplified Registers (SRs) prototype officially introduced to the MoTeCH districts in April 2010, exhibited a simpler layout and design with a consolidated number of required registers (scaled down from 12 to 5 total books). Mdm. Felicia Akansi, a midwife at the Navio Community Health Compound, explained, "with the simplified registers... you don't need to pick one book and look for another, for you have everything in one book. It's easy to use." The new registers, through streamlining all crucial health data into fewer locations, is intended to provide direct benefits to health workers in both the initial entry and monthly report generating processes.

Preliminary findings have indicated that the SRs have made significant impacts on the work of the CHOs. Health staffs have pointed out that the new registers allow them to spend less time on data entry activities and more towards client encounters. Mdm. Tidinchana further clarifies, "it helps us to attend to other clients first," unlike some instances before, when extensive data entry efforts would sometimes result in clients "having to queue for a long time." Routine outreach activities performed by the CHOs, including visiting schools and homes, have also benefited from the SRs. Mavis Amenga-Etego, a CHO from the Kassena Nankana-East Health Centre, described this benefit in terms of practicality, for "when

you are going out for an outreach, instead of carrying so many books, it is just one book that you carry... its very helpful.” An increased priority for chasing defaulters was also noted as another significant advantage of the time savings provided by the use of SRs.



Mercy Tidinchana, a CHO at the Kajelo Community Health Centre, says the SRs “help make our work go smoothly.”

The introduction of the SRs into the study districts has also illuminated some key challenges. From the health care worker’s perspective, the greatest criticism has been directed towards the mid-year transfer process from the old registers to the new SRs. This exercise requires the CHOs to manually transfer all of their former client records from January 1st that year, into the new registers. Although an isolated incident, this is a strenuous and time consuming task, often requiring nearly 2-3 full days to complete. The MoTeCH team understands these concerns and hopes to develop a more systematic approach of the transfer process through the adoption of computer-based data entry solutions.

Since their introduction, the simplified registers have begun to be adopted beyond the initial MoTeCH districts, including the Upper East’s Ghana Essential Health Intervention Programme (GEHIP) districts of Bongo, Builsa, and Garu Tampane and the new MoTeCH site in Awutu Senya, Central Region. In October 2011, an endline time-use study will be conducted by MoTeCH scientists evaluating the overall impact of both the SRs and MoTeCH produced automated reports on the work of community health staff. These findings, paired with the knowledge gained from additional qualitative work and surveillance activities, will provide even greater insight on the potential impact and benefits of these innovated registers on both MoTeCH and the health system more broadly.

- Esther Azasi, Maggie Schmitt, Allison Stone

MoTeCH is a collaborative initiative led by the Ghana Health Service, Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, and the Grameen Foundation. MoTeCH Calling is produced by the Regional Health Administration, Upper East Region, in collaboration with the Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University. Funding for the project is generously provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.