



TECHNICAL BRIEF

Improving quality of services through use of an integrated patient records system at Al-Mulhaq Primary Health Care Clinic, Karbala, Iraq

Background

The USAID Primary Health Care Project in Iraq (PHCPI) is collaborating with the Iraqi Ministry of Health (MOH) to improve access to and quality of primary health care (PHC) services throughout the country. A major component of the project's work over the last three years has been to introduce an integrated PHC patient records system. Under the former system, each vertical intervention resulted in its own patient record kept separately, making it difficult for health care workers to gain a comprehensive view of the patient in front of them. The new paper-based system reduces the number of records from more than 140 to just 38, thereby lessening the human resources and time needed for entry and archiving of patient data, and greatly improving workflow at the PHC level. By presenting health care staff with a complete view of a patient's health record, the new system is also designed to reduce medical errors and improves the quality of care provided.

The updated integrated patient record system was finalized in partnership with the MOH in 2012. From 2012 – 2013, PHCPI introduced the new system to health care staff from 360 PHC clinics in all 18 provinces through on-the-job training. In August 2013, the MOH announced its intention to begin rolling out the new patient record system to all PHC centers throughout Iraq.



A health care worker in IMCI department in Al-Mulhaq Clinic/Karbala, Iraq using the updated patient record system developed by USAID/PHCPI

Methodology

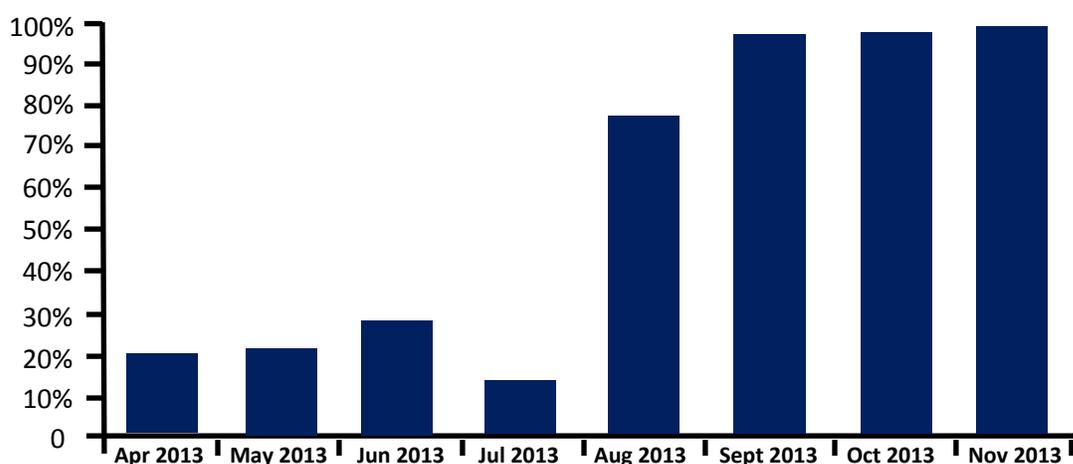
The Al-Mulhaq Primary Health Care Center (PHCC) is a model PHCC serving a catchment population of approximately 37,000 in Karbala Province of central Iraq. A study was conducted on the Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI) department of Al-Mulhaq PHCC. IMCI is a strategy developed by WHO and UNICEF aimed at the prevention or early detection and treatment of the leading childhood killers. In low resource settings, it is advised that all children under five be assessed and treated utilizing the IMCI strategy at the PHC level. This study compared the percentage of children under five receiving IMCI services during the four months just before the introduction of the updated patient record system (April – July 2013)

to the percentage of children receiving IMCI services in the four months following the introduction of the updated patient record system (August – November 2013). The objective was to measure the impact of the new integrated patient records system on the quality of services provided by the clinic.

Results

From April 2013 – November 2013, the percentage of patients under five receiving IMCI services increased from 20% to more than 90% (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Patients (under 5 Years) Receiving IMCI services at Al-Mulhaq PHC Clinic



| | Apr/2013 | May/2013 | Jun/2013 | Jul/2013 | Aug/2013 | Sep/2013 | Oct/2013 | Nov/2013 |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Number of patient under 5 years attend the clinic | 882 | 794 | 891 | 875 | 894 | 792 | 891 | 885 |
| Number of patient under 5 years received IMCI care | 181 | 168 | 258 | 120 | 696 | 779 | 889 | 884 |
| Percentage | 20.52% | 21.15% | 28.95% | 13.71% | 77.85% | 98.35% | 99.77% | 99.88% |

Lessons Learned

Al-Mulhaq PHCC clinic staff benefited from the training courses rolled out by USAID/PHCPI in helping them overcome challenges to implementing the new system. Some staff members were initially hesitant to change the old system and had significant concerns that the new system would lead to delays in their day-to-day work. However, based on the data presented above, health care workers at Al-Mulhaq now recognize that the new system promotes standardization and has the potential to further improve their performance and optimize clinic quality and efficiency. Staff now report that use of the new patient records system has improved communication among providers, led to better-coordinated care, promoted patient involvement in health care decision-making and helped providers to catch and prevent errors.

According to the Director of Al-Mulhaq PHC clinic, Karbala, Iraq, the new patient records system:

- *Improves communication between health professionals;*
- *Speeds up access to patient's data;*
- *Speeds up access to diagnostic support;*
- *Reduces duplication of data, examinations/procedures, prescriptions, and referrals.*
- *Reduces costs and ensures better quality primary health care.*

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