

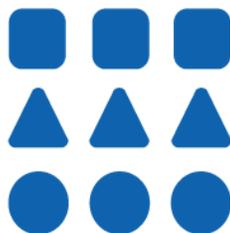
## KEY FACTORS INFLUENCING HIGH-PERFORMING HEALTHCARE SITES IN LOW-RESOURCE SETTINGS

*High-performing facilities were defined as those whose performance exceeded expectations or that one would recommend to a friend or relative.*

*"We work together.  
We join hands without  
discrimination."—Provider*

*"We are all nurses.  
Nobody is above the rest.  
We are all here. We have  
unity. If positive, we share.  
If negative, we share."  
—Supervisor*

*"Staff here treat clients like  
friends."—Client*



*"One goal we are working  
towards here is to please  
clients. Through monthly  
meetings we discuss  
individual problems,  
weaknesses, and get on-  
the-job training."—Provider*

In Kenya, some healthcare facilities consistently outperform other sites in providing high-quality family planning (FP) and reproductive health (RH) services despite facing similar obstacles and having comparable access to resources. These facilities, or high-performing sites, were found to have a consistent stock of key supplies, maintain good relations with clients and their communities, and keep cleaner facilities than other sites within their region. An innovative study completed in August 2001 by the Training in Reproductive Health (TRH) Project in Kenya explored the key qualities that allow these sites to excel. The study focused on the positive traits and strategies exhibited by high-performing facilities to determine how to improve performance at average and low-performing sites.

Findings from this two-phase, cross-sectional study reveal that high-performing sites (9 facilities from Phase I and 13 from Phase II) have mechanisms in place to help achieve their goals. They also effectively innovate and adapt to rapid and turbulent changes, a key element of organizational resiliency<sup>1</sup>. For example, many of the exemplar sites held regular staff meetings to discuss problems affecting the delivery of high-quality health services and to try to find creative solutions.

### SEVEN PERFORMANCE FACTORS

Performance improvement experts have identified seven performance factors they believe influence organizational performance:

- clear job expectations;
- consistent performance feedback;
- motivation;
- strong management or leadership;
- up-to-date knowledge and skills;
- adequate facilities, equipment, or supplies; and
- a strong client and community focus.

The high-performing site study in Kenya found the latter five of these factors were common and particularly influential among the exemplar sites.

The effective functioning of management systems and leadership was a crucial factor in maintaining high performance at the sites assessed. These facilities maintained an open environment for communication and had either a strong leader or standard operating system (such as regular staff meetings and/or performance targets and monitoring mechanisms) in place.

<sup>1</sup> Robb D. 2000. "Building resilient organizations." *OD Practitioner* 32(3): 27–32.

Teamwork—classified in the context of this study as a motivational trait—was an important part of the culture at these sites, with providers identifying common values and goals and a shared belief in equality among all staff.

The sites assessed also provided client- and community-focused services. For example, staff and client feedback was gathered and addressed regularly, thus helping to ensure that services continually shifted to meet community needs. Interviewed clients indicated that they chose to return to the high-performing site not only because it was the closest one to their homes or because they had no other options, but because they received what they came for (e.g., supplies, services) in a clean and respectful environment.

#### **Site Selection:**

- Key stakeholders were drawn from the Kenyan Ministry of Health, Marie Stopes, Christian Health Association of Kenya, Family Planning Association of Kenya, and other area Cooperating Agencies
- Sites were a mix in level of care, location, and affiliation, and included 10 hospitals and 12 health centers/clinics
- 12 were in urban settings; 3 in periurban; 7 in rural
- 45 supervisors, 55 providers, and 236 clients were interviewed; infrastructure, supplies, and equipment were audited
- 10 focus group discussions were held with 74 community members (including users and non-users of high-performing sites) and separated by gender

Staff knowledge and skills appeared to be up-to-date in all of the high-performing sites assessed. Providers exhibited appropriate infection prevention (IP) practices and took advantage of learning opportunities to keep their knowledge and skills current. Those who attended workshops were responsible for updating their colleagues once they returned to their site. Exemplar sites also maintained adequate facilities, equipment, and supplies, and necessary goods were regularly ordered. IP supplies and contraceptives were readily available and the infrastructure of these sites, including a clean waiting room and exam room, was in place. In cases where there was still a shortfall in supplies, high-performing sites had developed coping strategies. For example, many of these sites relied on partnerships with other health facilities or used funds gathered through cost-recovery mechanisms to purchase needed supplies.

#### **IN SUMMARY**

This study suggests that five of the seven common factors essential to effective performance and characteristics associated with resiliency are key contributors to high performance of health services within low-resource settings. In fact, the presence of organizational resiliency characteristics seemed to allow many of the high-performing sites to maintain high performance over time. For example, many of the sites assessed used innovative problem solving to manage and overcome last minute stock shortages. Thus, study results indicate that in order to improve the quality of healthcare delivery sites in a sustainable way, quality improvement initiatives need to focus not only on improving the clinical skills of providers, but also on strengthening staff problem solving and assisting supervisors to effectively manage change. Findings from this study will now be used to help focus and prioritize interventions aimed at improving the performance at average and low-performing health facilities.

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