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Planning, Developing & Supporting the Health Workforce

Performance-Based Learning: Applying a New Approach at a Nursing School in Mali

Dr. Mohamed Salia Maiga

In Mali's remote and resource-poor northern zone, a nursing school is training health workers to serve the diverse population of this region. At the *Ecole des Infirmiers de Gao* (EIG), around 40 faculty members provide instruction for approximately 240 students.

One of the Capacity Project's main goals is to develop better education and training programs for the health workforce, in order to improve quality, accessibility and use of priority health services. Working closely with the EIG, the Project introduced a Francophone version of its Learning for Performance guide and workbook, which helps connect learning to specific job responsibilities and competencies.

"This approach is focused on the essence of what health workers need [to learn] in order to do their work in a hospital, a health clinic or a community health center," says Dr. Mohamed Salia Maiga, the EIG's director of studies. "To get started, we chose the modules on reproductive health and pediatrics. We decided to change the name of the pediatrics module to child health, since we realized that the necessary competencies went beyond pediatrics," he explains. "With the help of Capacity Project consultants, we followed these steps: define general objectives linked to the modules; visit sites to observe and discuss with alumni; determine critical competencies and tasks for each area; and develop objectives for training and evaluation. Twelve faculty members participated in all these steps, and we divided them into two groups to continue the development of new modules."

"Learning for Performance is an ideal approach for our context," says Dr. Hamada Maiga, executive director of the EIG. "What I personally appreciated about this approach is its participatory nature. All the participants were involved: the school's leaders, students, trainers and alumni," he notes. "There was such enthusiasm that the faculty spontaneously began [to use Learning for Performance] with other modules. They've said that it facilitates their work as well as the evaluation. We have even set up working groups to begin five other modules according to this approach."

Ecole des Infirmiers de Gao

Dr. Salia Maiga describes the advantages of Learning for Performance. "Before, each faculty member determined his own content to cover, which led to wide variations of a module from one year to the

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next and from one faculty member to another. This performance-based approach will enable us to standardize the curriculum with an emphasis on meeting the competency needs of our students," he says. "We have already noted several positive outcomes." He adds that "performance-based learning significantly reduces the gap between continued education and the base curriculum. For example, family planning is now taught at the school in all its components whereas before, students learned once they were in the field."

Dr. Hamada Maiga

Faculty of the school, regional health leaders and representatives of Mali's Ministry of Health have suggested that Learning for Performance should be adopted at national-level health training institutions. The authors incorporated lessons learned in Mali into edits to the guide and workbook, available in print and on the Capacity Project's website (www.capacityproject.org).

Using the Learning for Performance process can shorten the time required for training by focusing learning on what is most essential for the job, and improve job performance by teaching what is relevant to specific duties. Because of these characteristics, Learning for Performance can play an important role in key strategies to address human resources for health issues, including task shifting, developing new health worker cadres, accelerating the training and deployment of emergency hires and aligning training with national health goals.

"We still need time and resources to finalize the first two modules and the five others that have been started," says Dr. Salia Maiga. "But I can say that there has been a revolution in the very concept of instruction after this initiative. These changes are visible in each course."

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