

BRIDGING THE CLIENT - PROVIDER GAP IN NAMAYUMBA HEALTH SUB-DISTRICT, WAKISO

There are communities with no access to health services. This is an untenable and urgent situation. There are also communities with access to health services, but they chose not to use the services. This is also an urgent situation, and a waste of precious resources. Such a situation has been true in parts of Wakiso District where community members preferred traditional services because of mistreatment from providers and a persistent shortage of drugs in public facilities.

Wakiso District recognized this situation and took action through community involvement in Yellow Star.

The Yellow Star Programme

is a quality assurance system that works to improve the quality of health care using 35 performance standards. Health facilities are regularly assessed according to the standards; those that achieve all 35 standards are awarded a Yellow Star to symbolize quality services. Health workers who show excellence are also eligible to receive awards.

Wakiso District officials helped to train Community Development Workers (CDWs) and Health Centre In-Charges to implement quality improvement through the Yellow Star Programme. In select facilities, the Programme actively encouraged community involvement. CDWs oriented community members to their roles and responsibilities related to quality care.

Ms. Mary Nakazibwe, CDW, spearheaded this effort in Namayumba Sub-County for Health Facility. During a discussion with community members on quality of care issues, they identified several key changes related to communication and accountability that would give them a voice in health services. They proposed to:

1. Report health workers who provide poor treatment.
2. To facilitate the reporting, health workers should wear nametags at all times and post a duty roster.
3. Maintain a suggestion box at the health centre to provide anonymous feedback – including positive feedback, suggestions for improvements and complaints.

In January 2005, Ms. Nakazibwe shared people's suggestions with the In-Charge, Dr. who immediately instituted the use of name tags for health workers and a suggestion box.

Community members have actively used the suggestion box to voice grievances and challenge the health facility to find solutions for common problems. Everyone has noted positive changes in the past six months.

Mr. Lule Rogers Jr, a client, described changes he has noticed. "The way the workers treat us nowadays has changed. They are more polite. There is also an improvement in the cleanliness of the health centre which shows that they are trying to get solutions to our problems. We have been writing our queries on pieces of paper and putting them in the suggestion box and I think they are now responding."

Ms. Aisha, a mother of two and a client of the health center, agreed. "The past six months have shown many changes in this health centre. There is water, the workers try to keep time, and the place is cleaner. It will be good if they continue like this."

The suggestion box is a key innovation. Mr. Paul Kalemera Suuna, Laboratory Assistant, explained, "The suggestion box is a good thing. We must know what the people are thinking. We discuss the messages that the In-Charge finds in there. Most people complain about the absence of drugs because they expect free treatment. This is a difficult thing for us, but we try with what we have."

Susan Mwebembezi, UPHOLD CPC Wakiso District concurs. "That suggestion box is an innovation of the CDW with the community. It is only six months old, but the people have a chance to communicate with the health workers. It is there to bridge that gap."

Wakiso District identified local solutions through community involvement to the common problem of underutilization of services due to poor communication between providers and clients. The suggestion box and name tags help clients communicate feedback to health workers. These innovations are helping to complete the cycle of communication to improve quality of services.