

The Growing Burden: Workload on Community Health Officers

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Abstract: Community Health Officers (CHOs) are essential in delivering primary healthcare services particularly in rural and underserved areas. However, the increasing workload on CHOs poses significant challenges to their efficiency and well-being. This commentary explores the expanded responsibilities of CHOs, including clinical duties and extensive administrative tasks, which contribute to their growing burden. Additionally, it addresses the lack of support from Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) in Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs), leading CHOs to assume tasks typically managed by ANMs. To mitigate this issue, it is crucial to establish clear roles and responsibilities for both CHOs and ANMs, ensuring accountability through block authority oversight, the implementation of structured guidelines, inclusion of ANMs in review meetings and display of Information Education and Communication (IEC) materials.

Keywords: Administrative burden, Community health officers, Primary healthcare

Introduction

Community Health Officers (CHOs) play a pivotal role in the healthcare delivery system[1], particularly in rural and underserved areas. They bridge the gap between the community and the healthcare

system, ensuring that essential health services reach the grassroots level. However, the workload on CHOs has been steadily increasing, posing significant challenges to their efficiency and well-being.

Increased Responsibilities

Over the years, the scope of responsibilities for CHOs has expanded significantly. Initially, their primary role was to provide basic healthcare services and health education. Today, they are tasked with a wide array of duties, including managing chronic diseases, maternal and child health services, immunization programs, and responding to emerging health crises such as pandemics. This expansion in responsibilities, while crucial for comprehensive healthcare delivery, has considerably increased their workload.

Administrative Burden

In addition to their clinical duties, CHOs are often burdened with extensive administrative tasks. These include record-keeping, data entry, and reporting, which are essential for monitoring and evaluation purposes but can be time-consuming and detract from patient care. The lack of adequate administrative support exacerbates this issue, leaving CHOs overwhelmed and overworked[2].

Challenges with ANM Support

In many Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs), Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) are not adequately supporting CHOs in their regular work. This has led to

CHOs taking on tasks typically handled by ANMs to meet HWC targets. This additional workload further exacerbates the strain on CHOs and impacts their ability to focus on their primary responsibilities.

Need for Clear Roles and Responsibilities

To overcome this burden, it is crucial to define clear roles and responsibilities for ANMs and CHOs. The block authority must take accountability for implementing these roles and responsibilities at HWCs. A clear guideline[3] should be established outlining the specific duties of both CHOs and ANMs. Furthermore, review meetings at the district level should involve ANMs with CHOs to ensure comprehensive team collaboration. Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials should be displayed in HWCs to clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of CHOs and ANMs, promoting transparency and accountability.

Impact on Quality of Care

The increasing workload on CHOs can negatively impact the quality of care provided to the community. Overworked CHOs may experience burnout, leading to decreased efficiency and potential errors in patient care. This can undermine the trust and rapport they have built with the

community, ultimately affecting health outcomes.

Need for Support and Training

To address the growing workload, it is imperative to provide CHOs with adequate support and training. This includes administrative assistance, regular capacity-building programs, and access to mental health support. By equipping CHOs with the necessary resources and skills, we can ensure that they remain effective and motivated in their roles.

Conclusion

This short review aims to highlight the pressing issue of the workload on Community Health Officers and underscore the need for systemic changes, including the clear definition of roles and responsibilities, to support these vital healthcare workers. The workload on Community Health Officers is a critical issue that needs urgent attention. By acknowledging and addressing the challenges they face, including the lack of support from ANMs and the need for clear role definitions, we can enhance their capacity to deliver high-quality healthcare

services. Investing in the well-being and professional development of CHOs, along with implementing structured guidelines and accountability measures, is essential for the sustainability and effectiveness of community health programs.

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