

Perceptions of institutional heads on the supply of consumables by the Regional Directorate – Experience from Sri Lanka

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Abstract- Provision of sustained supply of consumables is essential for the health care delivery. Regional Director of Health Services, Matara provides consumables to eighty health care institutes which has a high turnover. This cross-sectional mixed study aimed to assess the perceptions of institutional heads on the supply of consumables by the Regional Directorate. Level of satisfaction of institutional heads was assessed with a self-administered questionnaire and a focus group discussion among a purposive sample of institutional heads provided information on their perceptions. Study revealed over 40 (54%) heads were not satisfied with all four attributes related to provision of the selected consumables. Absence of a comprehensive need assessment mechanism, inadequacy of inventory management at RDHS office, inadequacy of inventory management at peripheral health care institutes and frequent purchasing of some consumables were the main gaps identified through qualitative analysis. Study recommends development and implementation of institute specific strategies to minimize the identified gaps.

Index Terms- Perceptions of Institutional Heads, RDHS Office and supply of consumables

I. INTRODUCTION

Health systems performance depend on staff, funds, information, supplies, transport, communications and overall guidance and direction to function hence, managing the supply chain of supplies is essential (WHO,2010). Office of Regional Director of Health Services (RDHS) is the focal point which manages the supply chain of consumables for health care institutes under provincial councils in 25 districts in Sri Lanka. Consumables are items which are used up after issuance from stores which become incorporated into other goods and lose their identity or cannot be used for their intended purpose without extinguishing or transforming their substance (Business Dictionary,2019).

A RDHS office Matara manages the supply of over 500 consumables which has a high turnover. These consumables are distributed to health care institutes. Inability of the RDHS office to provide the needed consumables in time affects the delivery of health services in all health care institutes under its purview. Strengthening the management of the supply chain of consumables at RDHS office ensures availability of required consumables. Further, ready provision of these would increase satisfaction of both patients and health care providers which in turn will ensure the quality of delivered service.

RDHS office, Matara provides consumables for eighty peripheral health care institutes including two type B Base hospitals (BHs), twelve Divisional hospitals (DHs), twenty-two Primary Medical Care Units (PMCU), seventeen Medical Officer of Health (MOH) offices, twenty-one School Dental Clinics (SDCs) and six special campaigns. Even though the Regional directorate attempts to ensure the smooth supply of the consumables, RDHS office received several complaints from the institutional heads on the supply of consumables issued through the consumable register and many out-of-stock occasions were observed. Regional directorate emphasized the need of streamlining current supply chain management practices related to provision of consumables issued through the consumable register for the eighty peripheral health care institutes which included seventy-three consumables. Adoption of strategies to strengthen the supply chain needs the identification of level of satisfaction of the recipient and perceptions and recommendations on possible alternatives which is evidenced by previous research (Donato et al,2016: Slone et al,2010 & Vries & Huijsman, 2011). Therefore, this research aimed to assess the perceptions of institutional heads on the supply of consumables by the RDHS office Matara.

II. METHODOLOGY

This mixed cross-sectional study was conducted in RDHS area, Matara from October,2019 to April,2020. A self-administered questionnaire (SAQ) was used to assess the level of satisfaction of the institutional heads on provision of selected consumables. Questionnaire was prepared in English after reviewing relevant literature. A five-point Likert scale with the ratings, highly dissatisfied, dissatisfied, neutral, satisfied, and highly satisfied was used to assess the level of satisfaction of health care managers. Highly dissatisfied and dissatisfied ratings were considered dissatisfied and satisfied and highly satisfied ratings were considered satisfied in the analysis of findings of SAQ.

A Focuss Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted among heterogeneous group of institutional heads selected by a purposive sampling including Medical superintendents of two BHs, MOHs and Medical Officer in charges representing PMCUs, DHs and special campaigns using the FGD guide to assess their experience on the current supply of selected consumables until data saturation was achieved. All discussions were recorded and transcribed with the participants' consent. Statements were coded into thematic areas. Each thematic area was then converted into information.

Content validity and face validity was preserved by development of study instruments based on literature review and thorough discussions with relevant stakeholders and experts. Data collection and supervision of the process was carried out by the principal investigator to ensure reliability. Study instruments were pretested at RDHS office, Hambanthota and validated. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences 23. Ethical approval and administrative approval were obtained. Written informed consent was taken from all participants. Data was collected with minimal disturbance to daily operations and data confidentiality was maintained.

III. RESULTS

As per the information gathered through the FGD, needs of selected consumables of peripheral institutes is not assessed by RDHS office in a systematic manner. Instead, peripheral institutes request the selected consumables from RDHS office whenever the need arise. Majority said some consumables have been out of stock for more than once in a quarter therefore they were purchased by institutes in stock outs through individual measures. They were not guided on purchasing and were not trained on inventory management at institutional level. Some of them suggested the need of implementing a logistic information management system at RDHS level which would minimize the experienced stock outs. The discussion team appraised the commitment of Regional Director and the accountant yet express the need of systematic need assessment and inventory management at RDHS level. Further some stated the need of developing a guide on purchasing the consumables in stock outs.

Considering level of satisfaction of institutional heads on the methods adopted by the RDHS office to assess the needs of the selected consumables, only 10 (13.51%) were satisfied whereas 48 (64.86%) were dissatisfied. Sixteen (21.63%) were satisfied with the ability of RDHS office to provide the selected consumables on request while 44 (59.45%) were dissatisfied. Thirteen (17.56%) were satisfied with the measures provided to ensure uninterrupted service by RDHS office for out-of-stock conditions and fourteen (18.91%) were satisfied with the time taken to provide the items if they were not available on request. Distribution of level of satisfaction of peripheral institutional heads on selected four attributes in provision of selected consumable is illustrated in table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of level of satisfaction of peripheral institutional heads on selected four attributes in provision of selected consumables

	Indicator	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied
A.	Methods adopted by the RDHS office to assess the need of the selected consumables	10/74 13.51%	16/74 21.63%	48/74 64.86%
B.	Ability to issue the selected consumables on request by RDHS office	16/74 21.63%	14/74 18.92%	44/74 59.45%
C.	Measures provided to ensure uninterrupted service by RDHS office in out-of-stock conditions	13/74 17.56%	21/74 28.37%	40/74 54.07%
D.	Time taken to provide the items if they were not available on request	14/74 18.92%	12/74 16.21%	48/74 64.87%

IV. DISCUSSION

In view of understanding the perspectives of the service recipient, satisfaction of institutional heads with different components of supply chain was assessed by a SAQ. Conducting of the FGDs among purposive sample of institutional heads provided descriptive information on observed gaps. Triangulation of data was facilitated by use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. This ensured the scientific validity and integrity of data. Majority of institutional heads were not satisfied with the current supply of selected consumables. Absence of a comprehensive need assessment mechanism, inadequacy of inventory management at RDHS office, inadequacy of inventory management at peripheral health care institutes and frequent purchasing of some consumables were the main gaps identified. The study findings aid to develop RDHS office specific strategies to improve the provision of the selected consumables which include

strengthening information management systems, streamlining procurement processes, implementing strategic purchasing, improving supply chain coordination, and building the competence of supply chain professionals. Implementation of developed strategies may increase the satisfaction of institutional heads while minimizing stock outs of the selected consumables.

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