



Patients at Umzinto Clinic in KwaZulu-Natal Have Better Access to Medicines for Chronic Diseases

Vuka Uzenzele.....“Wake up and do it for yourself” was the principle that inspired pharmacists in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa to implement initiatives that led to a 16% reduction in the number of packs of chronic medicine that were not collected by patients at Umzinto Primary Health Care Clinic in the Ugu North district. This improvement was achieved by the introduction of new systems and processes for managing medicine packs prepared at GJ Crookes Hospital (GJCH) and sent to the nearby Umzinto Clinic for collection by patients.

The project was implemented as part of the Pharmaceutical Leadership Development Program (PLDP) provided by the USAID-funded Systems for Improved Access to Pharmaceuticals and Services. PLDP is structured into five workshops held at monthly intervals. Working in teams, participants tackle one of their own workplace issues using the Challenge Model. In working through the model, participants create a shared vision and define one measurable result, thereafter identifying obstacles and developing an action plan. Teams then implement their plan and monitor and evaluate progress.



GJ Crookes Pharmacy Staff together with the uMzinto PHC Staff. Photo by the Zenzele Team

Umzinto Clinic has a monthly headcount of approximately 10,000 patients and issues an average of 1,200 chronic prescriptions prepared at the hospital. In November 2012, 34% of 644 medicine packs were left uncollected at the clinic. The clinic lacked a simple and effective system for managing packs of medicine for patients with chronic diseases sent from the hospital to the clinic each week.

Nurses at the clinic were responsible for sorting through the boxes, identifying, and issuing each patient’s pack of medicine on the day he/she came to the facility. This method contributed to long waiting times or patients not receiving their medicines on the correct day.

Pharmacists from GJCH developed a quality improvement project with the aim of improving access and availability, and reducing patient waiting times for chronic medicines issued from the clinic. The team implemented three important changes:



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- Optimising use of space in the consulting room: The furniture in the consulting room was re-arranged to allow for the use of steel cabinets to store patient ready packs within easy reach. Old and non-functional equipment previously stored in the room was removed to allow more space for the nurses to work.
- Arranging chronic medicine packs in alphabetical order: A pharmacist's assistant from the hospital visits the clinic on a weekly basis to put the individual packs in alphabetical order in the newly reorganized steel cabinets. This made it easier for the nurse to retrieve and issue the right pack for each patient who presents at the clinic.
- Using patient appointment cards: Patients receive a card with the date on which they should return to collect their medicine pack.

These few changes made a big difference in patients' experiences at the clinic. The new arrangement helped reduce waiting time at the clinic because the nurse no longer had to spend time sorting and searching the boxes to find the right medicine pack. As a result, in March 2013— five months later—there were fewer uncollected packs at the clinic. The pharmacists involved in the project all agreed that this was achieved only because of the collaboration and teamwork between staff at the clinic and the hospital.

