



When Inaccurate Data Can Be Life-Threatening

Improving Demand Planning at the National Level

GHSC-TA

A single mother living with HIV in South Africa takes her medicine every day to manage her disease. Even so, she has not managed to achieve viral load suppression. Every two months, she leaves her children with her neighbor, walks two kilometers to the nearest taxi collection point, and takes two taxis to the clinic to collect her medicines. After a nine-hour journey, she finally arrives at the clinic. However, when the pharmacist checks the stock room this time, the clinic is out of the medicines, so the mother is told to come back another day.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Global Health Supply Chain Program – Technical Assistance (GHSC-TA) is working with provincial departments of health across South Africa to increase medicine availability countrywide. GHSC-TA works with the National Department of Health (NDOH) to produce innovative processes, tools, and workforce training that will transform South African supply chain planning. This project will support public health facilities to accurately anticipate patients' needs and then to ensure that they keep as many medicines in stock as needed.

GHSC-TA is training staff to perform accurate demand planning that can be used to inform procurement activities and support supplier relationship management. By developing new processes and governance structures for

governance structures for NDOH, GHSC-TA is rolling out a set of interventions to improve demand planning for antiretroviral drugs (ARVs), tuberculosis (TB) treatment, vaccines, and other essential medicines.

More accurate demand planning enables accurate procurement and improved supplier relationship management.

There are several reasons why the clinic mentioned at the beginning of the story may not have had the ARVs in stock. Perhaps they had ordered less than they needed to have in stock because of inaccurate projections of demand. More accurate demand planning at the provincial level could help eliminate this issue. Or, perhaps the supplier did not fulfill the facility's order that month because of a missed payment at the depot level. In that case, an accurately generated budget from the NDOH can be used to track actual performance and ensure improved supplier payments, leading to improved product availability. The key is an accurate forecast.

The best part of GHSC-TA's demand planning activities is that it has built the capacity of the NDOH to produce accurate demand planning

forecasts on its own. Not only does this increase the capacity of the NDOH, but it also improves the sustainability of the process.

Provincial pharmacies and other public health care facilities now have an improved projection of which medicines they should keep in stock and at what levels. With support from the NDOH's more accurate demand planning forecasts, these providers can shift their orders to more accurately reflect the necessary stock levels. So, the next time the mother makes the long journey to pick up her medicines, the facility should be able to provide the necessary treatment without issue.

