



Improving Quality Care in Malawi with Pharmacy Assistants

The Pharmacy Assistant (PA) Training Program in Malawi is contributing to a robust pharmaceutical workforce through the introduction of a two-year certificate-level training program focused on improving medicines management and pharmaceutical practice in health centers. By end 2018, approximately 270 Pharmacy Assistants will have graduated, of which more than 190 have already been deployed to work in health centers throughout the country (against the Ministry of Health's target of 650 by 2020). Additional students are currently being trained.

Addressing a Shortage of Qualified Personnel

Malawi, like many low- and middle-income countries, has a critical shortage of pharmacy personnel. Previously, the government health centers had no trained pharmacy personnel on staff. This led to unqualified personnel managing medicines and medical supplies and dispensing to patients, which impacts patient care and medicine availability. The Ministry of Health has set a goal of having a Pharmacy Assistant in every rural health facility.

Hands-on Training to Solve Real Problems

In collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the Pharmacy, Medicines, and Poisons Board (PMPB), and our partners, VillageReach launched a two-year program at the Malawi College of Health Sciences with a strong emphasis on supply chain management and hands-on learning including two five-month practicums. Not only are students trained to dispense life-saving medications and provide patients with advice, they also gain the necessary skills to improve the availability of medicines and their proper management, along with better data for the Ministry of Health. USAID has funded the program since 2013, most recently through the Global Health Supply Chain-Procurement and Supply Management (GHSC-PSM) project.



*Pharmacy assistant student recording data in storeroom at Area 18 Health Centre in Lilongwe district.
Photo Credit: Paul Joseph Brown*

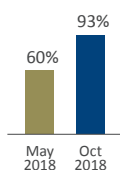
A training program focused on practical skills and experiential learning

- ✓ This pre-service program develops a cadre of skilled pharmacy personnel for health centers
- ✓ Field-based practicum placements provide immediate human resources to district hospitals and health centers
- ✓ Program prepares students for the environments in which they will work after completing their training

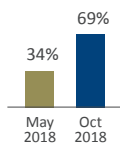
Increasing Health Worker Productivity and Access to Products

The Health Center In-Charges managing sites with Pharmacy Assistant practicum students often report substantial improvements in patient flow, decreases in waiting time, and relief from logistics and dispensing duties since the students arrived. A comprehensive evaluation is currently underway to assess the benefits derived over time from having Pharmacy Assistants on site.

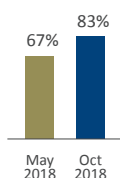
The most recent cohort of 36 Pharmacy Assistant students were able to demonstrate rapid improvements in access to products during their five-month practicum training. In a baseline study conducted before they arrived at practicum health centers in May 2018, stockouts for key medicines were 28%, but decreased to 17% after the Pharmacy Assistants arrived on site. Other supply chain indicators showed improvement as well:



Storeroom Management Practices, which includes measuring commodities that have expired, adherence to policies of first expired, first out, and having information accessible on cartons, improved from 60% at baseline to 93% almost 5 months later.



Dispensing Environment, which measures legibility of handwriting on prescriptions, notations for quantity, frequency and strength, and the tidiness of the dispensary area improved from 34% at baseline, before the students arrived at health centers, to 69% almost 5 months later.



Data Quality also improved significantly, for instance, the match between physical count and stock cards improved from 67% to 83%. Having accurate stock is critical to help reduce stock imbalances in the health system – limiting stockouts, which affect the ability to treat patients, and minimizing overstock, which can lead to expiries and losses.



Medical Assistant recording data in storeroom at Mlangeni Health Centre (mentee facility) in Ntcheu district. Photo Credit: Paul Joseph Brown

“Through this program, our LMIS reports are now being produced in time and this has made me concentrate on core business with the required quality. Having a Pharmacy Assistant has also improved the quality of care at our facility and for our patients.”

**—JAPHET KAPHIKA
MEDICAL ASSISTANT**

Nearly half of the rural health centers in Malawi have Pharmacy Assistants who are improving the provision of life-saving products to patients. With the commitment of the Malawi government and a strong set of partners, patients visiting every rural health center throughout the country will soon benefit from the presence of a Pharmacy Assistant.

Data from cohort 4b monitoring results based on student practicum placements in health centers in 2018.



U.S. President's Malaria Initiative



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