

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

FOCUS: population growth

Just like the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health receives a lot of funding from the government.

The Ministry of Health was allocated more than K27 billion in the 2012/13 budget and more than twice that much, K65 billion in the current budget year.

Some of these funds are meant for construction of staff houses and health centers – and the construction of new hospitals in Phalombe, Nkhata-bay and Dowa districts as well as other community hospitals.

Despite these efforts, population growth is hindering efforts by the government and other stakeholders to provide quality health services to Malawians.

Malawi's population has grown rapidly from almost four million in 1966 to nearly 15 million in 2012.

In this week's bulletin, we will look at how population growth is affecting the health care delivery system in the country – including lack of drugs at many hospitals, staff shortages and other problems.

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To increase knowledge of listeners on how population growth affects the health care system
- To give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on population growth and its effects on health care delivery
- To help journalists engage their communities in the search for solutions to population growth and the effects it has on health care system

The Problem: Population Growth and the Health Care Delivery System

Recent media reports have indicated that many government hospitals in the country are experiencing critical shortages of medicines.

The majority of patients in public hospitals are failing to get treatment because of shortages of drugs and as a result doctors are rationing the few medications they have.

The problem: a large population is making it difficult for the government to provide basic medical services.

That is, when there are a lot of people in a community or district, it is difficult for a hospital to take care of all the patients.

When there is rapid population

growth – like what is occurring in Malawi, not only are drugs in short supply. There are also shortages in medical supplies such as syringes, cotton swabs and antiseptic.

In May, 2013, the World Health Organization reported that in Malawi, there were only two doctors per 10,000 people and about three nurses and midwives per 10,000 people. This means that population growth has also led to a shortage of healthcare providers.

The bottom line: patients aren't receiving adequate care, since most wards are overcrowded. This can lead to all sorts of health issues among the population and a potential increase in the spread of diseases.

Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community understand how population growth affects the health care system in the country.

Make the following points to your audience:

Frequent drug shortages have overwhelmed the country's health system in recent years and this can be said to have been worsened by population growth.

According to a 2012 report by Oxfam, only 54 out of 585 local health facilities had the full Essential Health Package (EHP) or list of drugs for treating eleven common diseases in the country.

In fact, clinics were often out of basic antibiotics, HIV test kits and insecticide-treated mosquito nets. At that time (2012), public hospitals had run out of 95 percent of essential medicines.

A district hospital in Malawi, has an average of 250 beds, and, according to WHO, such a hospital is supposed to have 165 nurses. However, according to the Ministry of Health, there is no district hospital that has more than 40 nurses.

A long term solution for this problem is for people to consider using family planning methods to reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies.

There is need for traditional leaders and activists to encourage young people to consider a career in the medical profession so as to ease the shortage of health care providers in Malawi.

Do a vox pop with a few nurses from your district hospital and find out from them how overcrowding in hospitals affects them and their patients. How are patients affected when hospitals are packed with people? Are the local clinics and hospitals experiencing shortages of critical drugs?

Also interview ask some patients on how overcrowding in hospitals affects them.

Have a round table discussion with a doctor from the district hospital, a nurse, some villagers and a tribal chief. Discuss how population growth is affecting the delivery of health care to people in your district. What solutions do they offer?

Have an interview with the Minister of Health, honorable Jean Kalilani and find out from her how population growth is affecting the health sector in the country. What is her office doing to try to bring population growth under control? What more needs to be done?

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- http://www.who.int.../ccsbrief_mwi_en.pdf



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