

# CREHS NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2008

The purpose of this newsletter is to inform readers about current developments of the Consortium for Research on Equitable Health Systems (CREHS) including research, publications and events. This issue focuses on our work on health worker performance, one of the Consortium's key research themes.



## IN THIS ISSUE

- Highlighting the importance of improving health workforce performance: we explain why this issue is key for strengthening health systems in low and middle income countries
- New research focuses on the retention of nurses in Kenya, South Africa and Thailand
- Partner focus: Ifakara Health Institute in Tanzania

## Improving health workforce performance

Natasha Palmer

Health workers are one of the key building blocks of an efficient and equitable health system. Without their expertise many health care interventions cannot be delivered. They are also the element of the system that makes health care either acceptable to clients and therefore more likely to be effective, or can act as a deterrent to people seeking care.

As such it is important to think both about the numbers and types of health workers that are needed to make a health system function, and about the way in which these health workers behave and treat patients.

The shortage of health workers globally, and in particular in areas with the highest need has been highlighted by a number of international bodies recently. The work that is being undertaken by CREHS focuses on the health workers who are still in rural and disadvantaged areas, and what can be done to improve the chances of them staying there, and working most effectively with the communities that they aim to serve.

In this issue of the newsletter we highlight two pieces of research that are ongoing. One is looking at the

factors that impact on health workers' decisions about where they will work, and the other looks at ways in which accountability and trust between communities and health workers can be maximised.

## DEVELOPMENTS IN BRIEF

- The **updated CREHS website** provides detailed information about our key research themes: health sector reform, risk protection mechanisms, health worker performance and scaling-up.
- **New CREHS blog** documents current research on health workers in Kenya, South Africa and Thailand.
- Our latest **CREHS policy brief** provides recommendations for implementing the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness strategy in Kenya.

For more information about these developments and other CREHS outputs go to:

[www.crehs.lshtm.ac.uk](http://www.crehs.lshtm.ac.uk)



The Consortium for Research on Equitable Health Systems aims to generate knowledge about how to strengthen health systems, policies, and interventions in ways that preferentially benefit the poorest. It is funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) UK.

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## RESEARCH UPDATES

### Strategies to improve the recruitment and retention of health workers in rural areas in Kenya, South Africa and Thailand

The vast majority of poor and disadvantaged patients live in rural areas where health services are least developed. A major constraint to improving the availability and quality of services in these areas is that it has been difficult to attract and retain skilled health workers. Importantly, very few of the most qualified health workers, particularly professional nurses and doctors, choose to work in rural areas.

The aim of this research project is to support the identification of more effective policy interventions to improve the recruitment and retention of health workers in rural areas. Our study will investigate the attitudes, values, preferences and early career choices of a cohort of nursing graduates in Kenya, South Africa and Thailand. A cohort of doctors will also be followed-up in Thailand.

A baseline survey has already been conducted with the selected nursing and medical graduates in Thailand and South Africa, and is about to be completed in Kenya. The study cohort in each country will be followed up over time to observe the actual career choices that health graduates make. We will compare these choices to their initial stated preferences, and evaluate how their preferences change after practical working experience in different settings. Regular contact is being maintained with the graduates through our blog.

For more information about this research please contact Mylene Lagarde: [mylene.lagarde@lshtm.ac.uk](mailto:mylene.lagarde@lshtm.ac.uk)

### Examining the links between accountability, trust and performance in health service delivery in Tanzania and Nigeria

Local-level accountability structures, such as health facility committees, are integral to the effective functioning of health systems. In many settings, however, these structures have proven difficult to implement and sustain.

This research project considers the factors that influence the functioning of health facility committees and their impact on the delivery of primary health care services. The aim is to contribute to the improved functioning and sustainability of these structures and to enhance the quality of health services.

Research will be conducted in Tanzania and Nigeria using a case study approach with two health facility committees being selected in each country. Research teams will collect data using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. The project is currently finalising data collection instruments and will be completed by March 2010.

For more information about this research please contact Ermin Erasmus: [ermin.erasmus@nhls.ac.za](mailto:ermin.erasmus@nhls.ac.za)

#### In the next issue

The next CREHS newsletter will focus on implementation issues in health sector reform, and will include research findings and policy recommendations emerging from this area of work.

## PARTNER FOCUS: IFAKARA HEALTH INSITUTE (IHI), TANZANIA

[www.ihl.or.tz](http://www.ihl.or.tz)



IHI is an autonomous, not-for-profit organisation that conducts health research in Tanzania. The institute aims to develop and sustain a district-based health research and resource centre that is capable of generating new knowledge and relevant information for public health policy and actions. Its objectives focus on: increasing research outputs; strengthening dissemination of research findings for public health policy formulation and actions; and strengthening the institution in terms of human resources, business process management and financial sustainability.

Whilst IHI, formerly the Ifakara Health Research and Development Centre, is best known for research on malaria, it also carries out research on health systems issues including: equity and vulnerability, health financing, human resources, governance and accountability. CREHS research with IHI includes work on the implementation of the Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses strategy and on accountability structures at primary health facilities in Tanzania.

## NEW PUBLICATIONS

Our publications are available on the website: [www.crehs.lshtm.ac.uk/publications.html](http://www.crehs.lshtm.ac.uk/publications.html)

### Implementing IMCI in Kenya: challenges and recommendations by K Mullei and C Goodman

This **policy brief** explores the challenges to implementing IMCI in Kenya. These are: low training coverage; issues of adherence to guidelines by trained health workers and barriers to access for community members. The brief outlines recommendations for increasing IMCI coverage and improving implementation.

[www.crehs.lshtm.ac.uk/downloads/publications/IMCI\\_policybrief.pdf](http://www.crehs.lshtm.ac.uk/downloads/publications/IMCI_policybrief.pdf)

### Community health workers: a review of concepts, practice and policy concerns

by BM Prasad and VR Muraleedharan

This **working paper** provides an overview of the concepts and practice of community health workers (CHWs) from a range of developing and developed countries and identifies some policy challenges that remain in designing effective CHW schemes, particularly in the Indian context.

[http://www.crehs.lshtm.ac.uk/Community\\_health\\_workers\\_prasad.pdf](http://www.crehs.lshtm.ac.uk/Community_health_workers_prasad.pdf)