SHORT REPORT

Quality Assurance Project: the Second Five Years

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USAID-FUNDED QUALITY ASSURANCE PROJECT BEGINS SECOND FIVE YEARS

The Quality Assurance Project (QAP) has recently begun its second 5-year period of implementation under contract from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) to the Center for Human Services (CHS), based in Bethesda, Maryland, USA. The new contract, which operates from September 1996 through to September 2001, continues to pursue the original QAP objective of improving the quality of health, population and nutrition services in developing countries through technical support to service provider institutions, USAID Missions, and field-based cooperating agencies.

In its second phase, QAP will place even greater emphasis on demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of quality assurance (QA) interventions. To achieve these goals the project will establish sustainable QA programs at the country level, and conduct operations research to document the impact and cost-effectiveness of QA techniques and applications. It will also develop systematic QA training approaches and materials, and establish accreditation programs and other regulatory mechanisms.

Collaborating with CHS on the new contract are the Joint Commission International, the Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health, the Johns Hopkins University Center for Communication Programs, and the Johns Hopkins Program for International Education in Reproductive Health. A new partner in QAP, the Joint Commission International (a partnership of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations and its not-for-profit consulting subsidiary, Quality Healthcare Resources, Inc.) draws on the Joint Commission's technical leadership in quality measurement and accreditation from over 40 years of experience measuring, evaluating and improving the quality of health care organizations throughout the United States. Addition to the QAP team of the Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs and Program for International Education in Reproductive Health (JHIPEGO) brings state-of-the-art resources in health communication and training technologies to the project.

CONTINUING FIELD PROGRAMS: NIGER, ZAMBIA, JORDAN, ECUADOR

The new QAP contract has continuing long-term field programs in Niger, Zambia, Jordan and Ecuador:

— In Niger, QAP is supporting the institutionalization of quality management at the district level in Tahoua Province and fostering the extension of the Tahoua experience elsewhere in Niger through assistance to CARE/Niger and collaboration with the BASICS project.
— QAP is collaborating with the recently created Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate of the Zambian Central Board of Health to develop a program for QA training, creation of provincial QA Committees, coaching for facility-based quality improvement, and accreditation.
— In Jordan, QAP continues to support institutionalization of QA throughout the Ministry of Health through technical assistance to national level committees and units concerned with quality and facility-level quality improvement teams.
— QAP's resident advisor in Ecuador is directing a diverse program of activities to expand awareness and foster institutionalization of quality assurance activities by the Ministry of Health and non-governmental organizations. This program includes QA awareness workshops, training of facilitators and microproject coaches, and dissemination through a national
conference and newsletters. Operations research to document knowledge of, and compliance with, prenatal-care standards is underway, as well as some 10 QA microprojects.

QA PROGRAMS PLANNED FOR HONDURAS, ERITREA

It is anticipated that new programs to institutionalize QA activities will be developed in Honduras and Eritrea in the project's first year.

COLLABORATION IN LATIN AMERICA

QAP is also collaborating with the Pan American Health Organization and the MotherCare Project to reduce maternal mortality in Latin America. QAP is responsible for developing, testing, evaluating and disseminating approaches to enhance the use of protocols, standards and guidelines at the first level of referral for emergency obstetric care.

SHORT-TERM TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

A continued priority activity of QAP is to provide short-term technical assistance in QA program design and training, quality of care assessments, standards development, quality management, and monitoring. Potential activities are now being explored in Peru, Jamaica, the Philippines, India, Malawi and West Africa.

QA TRAINING SOFTWARE

Methodological advancement remains a core QAP function. One of the innovations the project is now developing is an interactive, computer-based learning tool for quality assurance training — the Quality Assurance Kit (QAK). The software application will instruct users on methodological approaches and the use of specific tools, guiding the user through the QA process as applied to a situation he or she has chosen.

QA INFORMATION EXCHANGE ON THE INTERNET

In an effort to facilitate dissemination of QA experiences, methodologies and best practices to a wider audience, QAP is now making information on current project activities and publications available to download on the Center for Human Services' corporate web site (http://www.urc-chs.com). The project would like to explore the use of the Internet to hold special forums or discussion groups directed by QAP staff on topics such as application of specific QA techniques, cost-effectiveness of QA approaches, developing and monitoring standards, and "best practices" in quality assurance in developing country settings.

Further information about QAP activities is available by contacting the Quality Assurance Project, Center for Human Services, 7200 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 600, Bethesda, MD 20814, U.S.A.; Tel: 301-654-8338; Fax: 301-941-8427; http://www.urc-chs.com.