Health Commodities Management Information System Call Center: Cost-Effective and Sustainable User Support

Faster, more cost-effective support means satisfied customers and enhanced sustainability.

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"In the past, for any problem, no matter how big or small, I needed to wait for a visit from an information technology (IT) expert to work through a challenge with the Health Commodities Management Information System (HCMIS). With the newly established free call center, swift support is provided, which helps me to better perform my job," says Fasil Nega, a store manager at Semema Health Center in Tigray, about 1000 kilometers from Addis Ababa.

The HCMIS—a locally developed, user-friendly inventory and information management software—has been implemented in almost 500 health centers and hospitals throughout Ethiopia. The HCMIS is helping health facilities to improve commodity management, data visibility, and overall performance. For an implementation of this scale, user and system support was a challenge. When users faced problems with the system, they were required to either call an IT technician or wait for a support visit. This was the case for all kinds of challenges—from the simple ones, which could be solved with a few clicks of a mouse, to the more complex ones, which might require the physical presence of a technician. This approach, although effective in solving problems, often led to unnecessary interruptions in the system and was not cost-effective, due to expensive field visits to resolve simple concerns. While technicians made every effort to resolve issues over the telephone, this was an ad hoc solution. Clearly, a program this size needed a centralized support system to improve customer service and efficiency.

A survey conducted by the project in late 2013 and anecdotal information from users indicated that remote support through a dedicated phone line would be acceptable to users. The project, in collaboration with Pharmaceutical Fund and Supply Agency (PFSA) and the Ethiopian Telecommunication Agency, launched a toll-free helpline in February 2014. By dialing 8773 during normal business hours, facilities are able to receive immediate technical support from an experienced IT technician based at the central office.

Stickers with the free calling number were distributed to facilities to raise awareness of the new service and since the launch of the call center, about 300 calls from nearly 200 health facilities have been logged. Of these, approximately three-quarters of reported issues were solved through remote assistance without a direct visit to sites.

In facilities where Internet access is available, support is also provided using a software that lets the IT technician access the user's computer remotely. Through this approach, frequently cited questions—primarily concerning simple functions of the system—have been effectively addressed. Issues that can't be solved through remote assistance—mainly related to hardware—are referred to field support staff for onsite support.

HCMIS is helping health facilities to improve commodity management and data visibility.

The call center approach is part of PFSA and project efforts to strengthen the use of the system and enhance sustainability. It not only improves customer service with less system downtime, but it is more cost-effective. As an additional benefit, it provides managers with valuable information on the types of problems users face so they can be prevented in the future.

Back at Semema Health Center in Tigray, the HCMIS is running smoothly, serving its purpose of managing inventory and providing vital information for resupply and other important decisions. Faster, more cost-effective support means satisfied customers and enhanced sustainability. Future priorities for the HCMIS call center include transitioning the call center to PFSA management.

Benefits of a Centralized Call Center

- Faster support means less system downtime and improved customer satisfaction
- Remote assistance produces cost savings by reducing the number of field visits needed
- Centralizing customer support provides better data on common problems and helps solve them in the future
- Long-term system sustainability is enhanced

PLEASE CALL FREE OF CHARGE

8773

FOR IPLS / HCMIS TECHNICAL SUPPORT

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