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TECHNICAL REPORT:

An Introduction to the Field of Quality Improvement in Health Care

February, 2006
Tashkent, Uzbekistan



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ENSURING ACCESS TO
QUALITY HEALTH CARE
IN CENTRAL ASIA

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Bruno Bouchet, ZdravPlus Regional Quality of Care Director; Irina Stirbu, ZdravPlus Senior Program Manager; Nilufar Rakhmanova, ZdravPlus Quality Improvement Specialist for the ZdravPlus Project

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Improvement in Health Care
-Executive Summary**

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Executive Summary

Improving the quality of care has become a priority for all health systems around the world, because of obvious links between healthcare delivery systems and health outcomes. Accumulated experience over the past 20 years has revealed the complexity of healthcare systems as well as many lessons learned from the results of quality improvement efforts. Although there is no universal recipe for improvement across healthcare systems, people in charge of improving quality of care need some directions to start their improvement journey.

This manual gives an overview of the field of quality improvement and presents an improvement logic that might be used either as a step-by-step approach or as a more generic strategy with room for adaptation to local circumstances, depending on the level of responsiveness of the system to be improved.

A quality improvement effort aims at making changes in the healthcare system that address the causes of poor quality. To do so requires implementing an improvement strategy with 3 phases:

1. Identify issues and effective solutions through a small-scale pilot improvement project;
2. Replicate effective changes/interventions and the QI process to the entire healthcare system;
3. Institutionalize an improvement dynamic throughout the healthcare system.

These phases are not always consecutive; they can be simultaneous. For example, the pilot phase can continue discovering new solutions while effective changes are replicated to new geographic areas. The development of a QI policy, to institutionalize improvement mechanisms, does not need to wait until the end of the pilot or activities have been scaled up. For each of these phases, some tools and techniques exist and **Table 1** is summarizing the theory behind them, the expected end-results, and the type of activities involved.

This document presents the theories and activities involved in an improvement effort, from local facility-based activities to the nationwide effort of developing a comprehensive QI policy.

Table 1: Theory and Activities Involved in the Improvement of Quality of Care

	Pilot Small-Scale Quality Improvement Project	Replication of Quality Improvement Processes and Results	Institutionalization of QI Mechanisms
Theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality Management Principles • Quality Improvement Cycles • Quality Assurance Methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diffusion of Innovation • Spread Models • Behavior Change Theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy Development • Monitoring & Evaluation • Operations Research
Overall goal	Learning about the system	Disseminating changes	Sustaining improvements
Expected Results	Effective system changes and interventions are identified	Best practices (effective changes) are extended geographically through the entire system and produce health impact on the entire population	Mechanisms are in place, which contribute in a coordinated fashion to improving quality of care on a continuous basis
Examples of Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a Quality Improvement Cycle: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify the improvement goal and objectives 2. Develop a set of interventions & changes 3. Study the impact of interventions & changes • Develop standards of care/performance • Develop a local quality monitoring system • Document QI activities and results • Disseminate information about QI efforts to decision-makers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train new staff in QI • Inform about best practices and evidence-based medicine • Organize special conferences • Integrate QI efforts in regular meetings • Support the spread through supportive facilitation visits • Adapt new solutions to different settings • Publish results of the spread activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement patients' rights • Promote Evidence-Based Medicine • Develop a National Quality Monitoring System • Carryout new QI projects • Design effective licensing and certification of providers • Develop effective accreditation systems for facilities • Issue evidence-based regulations • Revise policies based on results and evidence