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Establishing a primary care cluster, Khlung district, Chanthaburi Province, Thailand

Chureerat Charoenchit

Khlung Community Hospital, Thailand

The purpose of this study was to assess approaches taken in establishing a primary care cluster at the Khlung Community Hospital and to build a more efficient model for primary care cluster operation. Qualitative research was conducted in three groups of 5 administrators, 12 practitioners and 8 clients. A research instrument was developed and utilized around a semi-structured, 3S model interview questionnaire focusing on staff, program structure, system operation and clients. Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were used to collect the data. The results revealed: (1) establishment of primary care clusters require staff who are well prepared to operate as multidisciplinary profession teams to best leverage existing physical and infrastructural assets; and (2) the need for the creation of proper forums for the exchange of knowledge and experiences that maximize information sharing among healthcare providers throughout the new operating environment. Establishing a primary care cluster provided an opportunity to assess teaming capabilities of existing staff; knowledge and ability of teams to operate under primary care cluster model; and expansion of the involvement of families and community in health care. This study highlighted the necessity of having the infrastructure in place, benefits of budget supplementation from community donations, support in the creation of a health promotion campaign for the hospital and pathways to overcoming logistical deficits that affect the delivery of healthcare via home visits. The study also helped in the formulation of service system improvements in appointment scheduling, improvements in doctor access, enhancements in the collection of population and illness data, boosting coordination between all provider team players after home visits: improvements in prescription medication monitoring and modernization of patient referral processes.

juju_chureerat@yahoo.com