DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RESEARCH BRIEF

Verbal Autopsy with Participatory Action Research (VAPAR)
Expanding the knowledge base through partnerships for action on health equity
Mpumalanga Health Policy and Systems Research Learning Platform
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vapar

Evaluating verbal autopsy data to support evidence-based community health systems

Verbal autopsy (VA) is a methodology for assigning levs and causes of deaths in populations. The VAPAR programme hosts the Mpumalanga Health Policy and Systems Research Learning Platform to strengthen mortality data with VA, combine this with local knowledge and interpret, plan and act on evidence to support and expand learning health systems in rural primary health care. To advance uptake of VA data in policy, planning and management, the VAPAR team evaluated the impact of the VAPAR programme.

The team completed a national, provincial and community-based evaluation of the VA programme in South Africa holding stakeholder discussions, hosting a provincial workshop in Mpumalanga and a national evaluation workshop with members of a ministerial committee in Johannesburg. The team collated evidence of impact in VAPAR and facilitated a series of interactive workshops reviewing the process and evidence to date, exploring impact and potential for impact in: research and stakeholder engagement (e.g. for national committees and standards agencies), cost savings in services (e.g. connecting surveillance data to clinical services, policy and planning changes (e.g. National Health Insurance monitoring) and health outcomes (e.g. under-5 mortality).

The study has led to two main recommendation: (1) that VAPAR evidence should be integrated into routine provincial and district health system processes, through the engagement of VAPAR researchers and ongoing provision of surveillance and response data in routine planning activities in the Department of Health, and (2) for Primary Health Care facility operational managers, Community Health Workers and Home-Based Carers to engage in the VAPAR process of surveillance and response and in skills exchange around community engagement. The VAPAR researchers have long standing relationships with Department of Health in Mpumalanga, the evaluation served to further expand these partnerships with the South African Department of Health. The collaborative working approach is now making a direct impact in helping to prospectively embed the VAPAR process into the South African health system thereby promoting scale up in provinces and potentially beyond the programme.

VAPAR workshop participants: Front: Mr G Maanda; Middle (fltr): Ms D Mdluli, Ms T Silinda-Masuku, Ms L Maluleke, Dr B Spies; Back (fltr): Ms T Thabethe, Dr L D'Ambruoso, Ms N Memela, Ms M van der Merwe, Ms D Mabetha

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