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Providing more patient information in medical records and making those records easily accessible helps health care workers ensure that patients take their properly prescribed medicines correctly. But until recently, Uganda health care workers and facilities faced scattered and incomplete recording information on prescribed and dispensed medicines, hindering consistent and proper patient care.

Now a simple innovative tool—the medicines prescription and dispensing log—integrates prescribing and dispensing information in one place where health workers can easily access the information. In 2011, the Ugandan Ministry of Health collaborated with the USAID-funded Securing Ugandans' Rights to Essential Medicines (SURE) Program to develop this tool, make it available in health facilities, and train health care workers on its use to improve their ability to prescribe and dispense medicines to patients.

The new prescription and dispensing log includes patients' medical history, types of medicines and how much should be given to the patients, and how the patients have progressed. This data helps health care workers provide effective and efficient patient care, including making sure that patients follow their properly prescribed medicine regimen.

"You have done well to bring us the dispensing log. This provides us with more information than the previous format. Now, we can analyze prescribing patterns of the prescribers," said Moses Wongo, the Acting District Health Officer, Butaleja.

Prior to collaboration, the Ugandan Ministry of Health Resource Center reviewed all health information management systems and the USAID-funded SURE Program worked with the

Pharmacy Division to streamline, integrate, and simplify the health management information tools.

The ministry found that prescribing and dispensing patterns were difficult to analyze because diagnostic and patient details were recorded in patient registers, whereas dispensed medicines were documented separately in the dispensing log. Patients kept their own prescription forms, and those who prescribed the medicines did not always record the prescription in the logs. And, specific medicine regimens for tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS patients had separate dispensing logs. This disjointed system also hindered data collection that, when analyzed, could help improve health systems.

The new tool was released in March 2011, and the SURE Program procured more than 3,000 copies of the logs to use in 1,680 facilities throughout the program's 45 supported districts. Medicines Management Supervisors distributed the logs during their visits to health facilities while explaining to health workers their importance and how to use them.

The prescription and dispensing log captures diagnoses, quantities of medicines dispensed and prescribed, and the initials of the prescriber and dispenser for each patient – all in one place. In addition, the generic format makes it usable in any health facility department. Ultimately, integrating this data facilitates access to and analysis of medicines use data while also making sure the patient receives appropriate and quality care.

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