

CHAPTER 7

RECOMMENDATIONS, STRATEGIES AND MECHANISMS FOR IMPROVING PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE DELIVERY AT S.S.R.N.H.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter attempts to provide answer to the research question, what can be done to improve public health service delivery at S.S.R.N.H.? The provision of public health service is a challenging activity for S.S.R.N.H. While S.S.R.N.H. has set its foot on the right track of renewal of public health, the principal question for policymakers is how to improve and empower public health service delivery. The health environment is continuously changing and it is essential to adjust the public health services accordingly. To achieve excellence in public health service, it is important to improve it. An attempt is made in this chapter to identify strategies and mechanisms that administration can pursue to improve public health service delivery at S.S.R.N.H. Although the list of strategies and mechanisms proposed is far from exhaustive, it is nonetheless representative of the various methods that the Public Health Manager can use to improve public health services. In this subject of study, issues such as participation, accountability, transparency, empowerment, training, reduction of absenteeism, reduction of personnel turnover, morale, work satisfaction, coordination and communication, reduction of sexual harassment, promotion of professionalism, work climate, reduction of stress, reduction of burnout and avoidance of abnormal behaviours and actions have been analysed.

7.2 SUGGESTIONS FOR OVERCOMING THE SHORTCOMINGS IDENTIFIED AT S.S.R.N.H. THROUGH THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

No public health institution can undertake activities successfully without qualified and contented staff. The success of the public health institution is closely

interwoven with the happiness, qualifications, attitude and *esprit de corps* of its health officials. As S.S.R.N.H. now turns the corner meeting the new challenges of integration into the national and international health environments, it needs to deepen its reform agenda on the following key aspects of public health service:

7.2.1 Participation

Staff participation is widely regarded as the main spring of public health development. Also public participation is one of the criteria determining good governance in a democratic set up (Cumper 2000:51). Public participation plays a crucial role in sustaining democracy. For improving public health service it is essential to involve individual citizens, interest groups or group representatives in the processes of public health policy-making and implementation.

It has been found that when health planning and decisions are taken at S.S.R.N.H. very few staff are invited to discuss the issues related to health planning and decision. Therefore, public health service delivery at S.S.R.N.H. can be improved through active staff participation in health planning and decision making. The staff members can be invited to submit health proposals, give health advice and make health recommendations. When staff members are not involved in health decision making, it could lead to frustration and a feeling of powerlessness. This tendency may lead to a decrease in staff member's motivation resulting in stagnation which in turn may lead to deterioration in public health service delivery (Huber 1996:80). Should citizen participation be neglected, one may yet see the abuse and misuse of administrative and political power in the health domain. If citizen participation is widespread, it will keep the rulers accountable to the public and will prevent public health policy-makers from making health policies which are detrimental to the general welfare of the society (Weir 1984:31).

However, over participation of staff must be avoided; that is when a staff member participates to a greater extent by imposing proposals and making of recommendations than executing the work. Also staff participation in health decision making should be the option of the staff. No subordinate staff member should feel compelled to participate in health decision making if such decision belong to a hierarchical level higher than the one he or she holds (Taylor 1998:71).

7.2.2 Accountability

Another strategy for improving public health service delivery at S.S.R.N.H. is through greater accountability by public health personnel. Accountability is an important component of government machinery (Allen 1984:12). Every staff member of the hospital has a role to play in exacting accountability. But accountability is not merely a matter of exercising control; it is also a matter of rendering account, and internal and external surveillance by various stakeholders who act as watchdogs over the public health affairs (Richards 1995:23). Therefore, health personnel should be held accountable for health activities to a greater extent. The citizen also plays an invaluable role in enduring that health personnel pursue the public health interest.

7.2.3 Transparency

Openness and transparency usually go hand in hand. It is a fact that openness and transparency are fizzling out and that some public health institutions are so closed and opaque that bureaucracy and red tape result in poor public health service delivery (Taylor 1998:21). Secrecy and lack of transparency in public health service lead to abuse of power, corruption and maladministration (Huber 1996:24). Transparency is a critical principle that has to be implemented in public health service delivery at S.S.R.N.H. The activities of this health institution are thoroughly open to public scrutiny and there are many points of

contact between the institution and the community it serves. However, lack of transparency at S.S.R.N.H. gives Public Health Managers the opportunity to be oppressive in rendering public health services and could result in serious consequences for the patients. It can be argued that the lack of public access by health officials to public health information encroaches on the capacity of the public to exercise public power directly and intelligently on patients. Thus, secrecy, deception, obscure jargon and refusal of the right of access by health officials to public health information should be avoided at all times when rendering public health services (Richards 1995:91).

7.2.4 Empowerment

Empowerment is another issue that has a direct bearing on effective public health service delivery at S.S.R.N.H. Empowering is an act of building, developing and increasing power through cooperation of the health personnel (Ashton 1998:24). Empowerment is an initiated process that enables the health officials to gain power and extend it in a way that improvement of public health services becomes possible (Cumper 2000:41). This enables the health personnel to participate actively in decision making on health service delivery. Participation is a cornerstone of empowerment. For empowerment to become successful there must be elements such as the desire to improve public health services, awareness of the public health needs, acceptable climate, feedback and reward for improving public health services. In order to empower public health service by health officials it is imperative to have continuous consultation with the public. This will undoubtedly demonstrate goodwill and responsiveness (Tjam 1992:55). Empowerment is one of the consequences of participation. Therefore, once empowerment comes into operation, it spreads out from its starting point and builds a strong relationship between health personnel thereby leading to improvement of public health services (Mason 1992:43).

7.2.5 Training and development

Public health officials do not practice health activities in a vacuum, but within some or other area of public health administration and management. Knowledge of public health should be developed by means of academic training. Specialised training and development can assist public health officials to keep pace with current demands and can therefore improve public health services (Taylor 1998:2). Training can be seen as a sustained, purposeful, organized attempt to change health personnel's knowledge, skills, attitudes, technique, judgment, feelings and efficiency of public health services. Development is seen in a much broader context whereas training is approached and assessed mostly from the viewpoint of the trainer; the focal point in development is the health personnel (Huber 1996:71). Therefore in order to change the mindset of public health officials towards cost efficiency, quality and timely and effective public health service delivery it is essential to increase the capacity of health personnel through training.

7.2.6 Induction training for the new recruit

One of the reasons for ineffective public health service delivery is that very often the new recruits entering the public health service are ill prepared for the daunting challenges of the health environment. Some of the health personnel have been thrown at deep end and have had to swim without having been taught how. This disconcerting situation generates uncertainty and tension among the new recruits. Therefore, induction training should be thoroughly planned for the newcomer in order to yield maximum advantage. The first impressions of the newcomer are the lasting ones. It needs to be such that it will establish trust, confidence and positive attitudes towards public health services. Induction training enables the new recruit to incorporate quickly and easily into the health institutions thereby leading to effective public health service delivery (Mason 1992:33).

7.2.7 Reduction of absenteeism

In order to improve public health service delivery at S.S.R.N.H., absenteeism, should be reduced. An excessively high rate of absenteeism is very costly for the health institution, even if health officials are absent without pay. The extent of this problem was explored in section 4.3.1 of chapter 4 in this dissertation.

7.2.8 Reduction of personnel turnover

The reduction of personnel turnover can also contribute to the improvement of public health service delivery at S.S.R.N.H. One of the effects of a high turnover of staff is low morale amongst the remaining staff. Personnel turnover was addressed in section 4.3.2 of chapter 4. Reducing personnel turnover is a challenging task, because it is not caused by any one factor. In order to reduce personnel turnover the Public Health Manager must establish good communication between units, maintain a spirit of cooperation, team work and provide ample facilities for staff development (Pear 1995:80).

7.2.9 Maintaining a high morale

Public health services at S.S.R.N.H. can be improved by maintaining a high morale of health personnel. The problems of maintaining a high level of morale were discussed in section 4.3.5 of chapter 4. Morale of health personnel can be improved through establishing respect, trust, recognition of good performance, standard of supervision, maintaining favourable conditions of employment and providing opportunities for promotion. The section below addresses these issues.

7.2.9.1 Respect

Respect for each individual worker produces a high level of worker satisfaction. That is why the degree of respect shown by public to the health officials is an indicator of worker satisfaction. In the health institutions, respect forms a circle: health officials must respect leaders and leaders must respect health officials, who in turn must respect the institution's customers (Richards 1995:21).

7.2.9.2 Trust

There can be no worker satisfaction without trust. Trust is the glue that renders the health care organization cohesive and ensures worker satisfaction and thereby maintaining high morale (Mason 1992:80). Therefore, trust is an important ingredient for improving public health service delivery.

7.2.9.3 Recognition of good performance

To maintain a high level of morale, the health personnel must know that good work will be given official recognition, even if not necessarily in monetary terms (Moore 1989:11). Recognition of good performance motivates staff members to deliver efficient and effective public health service to the community.

7.2.9.4 Favourable conditions of employment

Favourable conditions of employment, for example, fair remuneration, congenial working environment and challenging and interesting work build a high morale among health personnel (Huber 1996:44). This improves public health service delivery.

7.2.9.5 Opportunities for promotion

Opportunities for promotion on a competitive basis are good for morale. There should be a definite policy with regard to promotion, which should be reflected in salary scales and the recruitment of promising health officials who are likely to merit promotion (Mason 1992:96).

7.2.9.6 Standard of supervision

To maintain high morale in the health institution, and to refute any criticism of favouritism or unfairness on the part of those who occupy supervisory positions, a policy of strict impartiality is essential. To promote sound morale, it is important to stimulate health official's enthusiasm and to establish genuine concern for rights and interests of subordinates (Mason 1992:13).

7.2.10 Coordination and communication

Coordination involves integration of work, the synchronisation of activities and balancing of workloads (Millard 1991:28). Communication forms the channel whereby health personnel may be motivated to work towards a mutual goal in a uniform way (Lyden 1989:77). By maintaining good coordination and communication in the health institutions, the morale of health personnel can be improved which may lead to effective public health service delivery.

7.2.11 Work satisfaction

Work satisfaction is considered to be an important determinant in the improvement of public health service. As the level of work satisfaction increases, absenteeism and labour turnover may decrease significantly (Moorhead 1989:13). It is therefore the tasks of the Public Health Manager to provide a work environment where needs for affiliation, regard, self-realisation, responsibility,

recognition of achievement and opportunities for growth are satisfied (Richards 1995:63).

7.2.12 Reduction of sexual harassment

The negative effect of sexual harassment was discussed in section 4.3.6 of chapter 4 of this dissertation. Reduction of sexual harassment in the health institutions may lead to effective public health service delivery. Sexual harassment can be reduced through policy formulation, employee surveys, special training, a procedure for investigation and proper disciplinary actions (Huber 1996:31).

7.2.13 Promotion of professionalism among personnel

Professionalism creates an *esprit de corps*, because those who are members of the same profession normally possess the same standard of training and education (Taylor 1998:40). It also promotes communication. Promotion of professionalism among health personnel may lead to effective public health service delivery. In order to promote professionalism it is important to establish realistic entry requirements and continuous, fair and reasonable application of the merit system in the public health institutions. Professionalism should be promoted through education and training as this will improve public health service delivery.

7.2.14 Work climate

The work environment can have either a negative or a positive effect on public health service delivery. The work climate of the health institutions is determined to a large extent by the Public Health Manager at all levels in the organisation.

The staff members should be made to feel safe in the work situation (Morrison 1993:18). Opportunities should be provided for growth and the achievement of higher status. Also challenges should be set for staff members (Huber 1996:41).

7.2.15 Reduction of stress

Public health service delivery at S.S.R.N.H. cannot be improved if stress among health personnel is not reduced. A high level of stress impairs efficiency and effectiveness of public health service delivery. Stress, undoubtedly, leads to psychological and physiological disbalance. Stress at S.S.R.N.H. was analysed to a greater detail in section 4.3.3 of chapter 4 of this dissertation.

7.2.16 Reduction of burnout

Another obstacle to effective public health service delivery at S.S.R.N.H. is burnout. Burnout is linked with stress. This refers to emotional exhaustion resulting from excessive pressure at work environment. Section 4.3.4 of chapter 4 explored the gravity of this problem at S.S.R.N.H. Burnout should be reduced so as to improve public health service delivery at S.S.R.N.H.

7.2.17 Avoidance of abnormal behaviours and actions

Research conducted at S.S.R.N.H. shows that the following abnormal behaviours and actions prevail: lethargy and disobedience, nepotism, shirking responsibility alcohol and drug abuse, active political interference, bribery and corruption, dishonesty and retaliation and neglect of duty.

7.2.17.1 Lethargy and disobedience

Lethargy and disobedience cause ineffective public health service delivery. The extent of this problem was discussed in section 4.3.7.1 of chapter 4 of this

dissertation. Therefore, lethargy and disobedience on the part of health personnel should be avoided at S.S.R.N.H.

7.2.17.2 Nepotism

The malpractices of nepotism in a public institution reduce the efficiency of public health service delivery and should be avoided. Section 4.3.7.2 explored this problem in chapter 4.

7.2.17.3 Shirking responsibility

Shirking responsibility should be avoided at all cost in order to improve public health service delivery at S.S.R.N.H. The results of the research conducted at S.S.R.N.H. concerning shirking responsibility was presented in section 4.3.7.3 of chapter 4 of this dissertation.

7.2.17.4 Alcohol and drug abuse

This is another factor that reduces effective public health service delivery. Section 4.3.7.4 of chapter 4 highlighted the extent of this problem at S.S.R.N.H. Therefore alcohol and drug abuse should be avoided at S.S.R.N.H. so as to improve public health service delivery.

7.2.17.5 Active political interference

Active political interference in public health institution leads to ineffective public health service delivery. This problem was discussed in section 4.3.7.5 of chapter. Hence active political interference by public official at S.S.R.N.H. should be avoided.

7.2.17.6 Bribery and corruption

Public health services at S.S.R.N.H. can be improved by avoiding bribery and corruption. This problem was analysed in Section 4.3.7.6 of chapter 4 of this dissertation.

7.2.17.7 Dishonesty and retaliation

The results of research survey carried out at S.S.R.N.H. on dishonesty and retaliation were discussed in Section 4.3.7.7 of chapter 4 of this dissertation. In order to improve public health service delivery at S.S.R.N.H. it is essential to avoid dishonesty and retaliation.

7.2.17.8 Neglect of duty

Neglect of duty can have serious repercussion on public health service delivery. The problems of neglect of duty were explored in section 4.3.7.8 of chapter 4 of this dissertation. Therefore it is important to avoid neglect of duty at S.S.R.N.H. in order to improve public health service delivery

7.3 SUMMARY

In this chapter, an attempt was made to explore some of the recommendations, strategies and mechanisms that can be used to improve public health service delivery at S.S.R.N.H. Staff participation in the health planning and decision making contributes a lot towards public health service improvement. It also motivates staff members. This chapter addressed issues such as participation, accountability, transparency and empowerment.

Moreover, this section of study explained the importance of training and development in public health service delivery. It was pointed out that training

improves health personnel's knowledge and skills. Additionally, induction training helps the new recruit to adjust and incorporate quickly into the health institutions. The chapter focussed on reducing absenteeism, sexual harassment, stress, burnout and personnel turnover in order to improve public health service delivery. Morale plays a crucial role in the public health institutions. Attention was devoted in this chapter to respect, trust, recognition of good performance, favourable conditions of employment, opportunities for promotion and standard of supervision as the strategies for improving public health service delivery.

Furthermore, good coordination and communication in the public health institutions are essential for improving public health service delivery. Also work satisfaction decrease absenteeism and labour turnover. Work climate has an impact on public health service delivery. It is essential to reduce sexual harassment and promote professionalism among personnel in order to improve public health service delivery. Attention was also devoted to avoiding abnormal behaviours and actions. All these issues were discussed in this chapter. Applying all these recommendations, strategies and mechanisms can contribute to create an ideal environment for effective public health service delivery at S.S.R.N.H. The last chapter of this dissertation deals with summary and conclusion of public health service delivery at S.S.R.N.H.