

Improving healthcare technology management support in East Africa

Andrei Issakov on one group that is raising its game



GAME – Global Assistance for Medical Equipment (<http://global-medical-equipment.org/>) is a US-based voluntary coalition of global healthcare technology management (HTM) professionals brought together by the common goal of assisting colleagues in resource-poor settings to address their HTM needs. The concept of GAME was developed in the early 2000s by the American College of Clinical Engineering (ACCE), Department of Health Services Provision, World Health Organization (WHO), Geneva, and the African Federation for Technology in Healthcare (AFTH). GAME is a means to support countries in implementing HTM solutions. Such solutions are identified and elaborated at the advanced clinical engineering/healthcare technology management workshops¹ but their implementation in a comprehensive and sustainable manner remains a challenge.

Recommended GAME activities include:

- assistance in identification and training of in-country HTM groups;
- on-site hospital healthcare technology analyses and assistance;
- expatriate HTM experts coming on-site for extended periods for mentoring and consulting with HTM groups at Ministry of Health (MoH) and health facilities;
- regular assistance to country HTM professionals through electronic means of communication, drawing upon the expertise of GAME team and HTM professionals worldwide;
- assistance with equipment donations and their proper handling;
- ultimately, to assist Ministries of Health (MoHs) in developing national HTM policies, strategies, and systems.

In 2006, WHO with ACCE and other partners conducted Advanced HTM Workshops (AHTMWs) in Ethiopia and Kenya attended by participants from MoHs, and public and private health facilities from East Africa. Key challenges identified in both workshops was a lack of awareness of decision-makers of the impact of HTM on health services delivery and best HTM practices, as well as skills in management, service, and maintenance of several key technologies, including medical imaging,

clinical laboratories, operating theatres, and intensive care.

To address these challenges, training was developed with active involvement of the Association of Medical Engineering of Kenya (AMEK), Uganda National Association for Medical and Hospital Engineering (UNAMHE) and the MoHs of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. This was held for 2 weeks in February 2009 in Kenya and Tanzania and was attended by some 70 participants. The programme was co-sponsored by WHO, GAME, AMEK, Orbis International, MedShare International, and DITEC. During the first week, medical engineering experts received maintenance training in a ‘train-the-trainer’ format. In the second week, engineering managers and senior MoH decision-makers received a broad HTM and policy training. Both these groups were joined by private health system staff to encourage public-private HTM partnerships whenever possible. In addition to the main goal of the programme, to strengthen HTM in East Africa, another goal was to identify resources necessary for ongoing and sustainable HTM development, to augment various in-country training and policy implementation initiatives, and to determine how to best organise assistance in providing needed resources to these countries. After the programme, DITEC donated several pieces of imaging test equipment to the Kenya MoH.

Since February 2009, the programme has been maintained through continued dialogue with, and ongoing advice to, country partners. In late 2009, DITEC received six biomedical engineers, two from each of the participating countries, at its facility in Ohio for 7 weeks of advanced imaging maintenance training to provide sophisticated imaging equipment support back home and teach many others what they had learned. This August, two more engineers from Kenya and one from Tanzania arrived in the US for 6 weeks of training at DITEC.

Intensive training is one major step; another involves providing countries with test equipment and spare parts to ensure this training can be put to best use. GAME is actively exploring all donor possibilities to this effect as well as to continue capacity building, and expanding its support to other African countries.

Reference

1. Advanced Clinical Engineering/Healthcare Technology Management Workshops (ACEWs/AHTMWs) is a regular training programme developed and run by ACCE, WHO, PAHO in cooperation with various partners since the late 1980s for developing country healthcare decision-makers and managers and HTM professionals. Today, there have been some 50 of these programmes with participants from over 90 developing countries, typically at least 35-40 attendees each. In the next issue of *Africa Health*, ACEWs/AHTMWs will be presented in more detail, particularly programmes held or to be held in Africa.

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