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Geographical distribution of Primary Health Care (PHC) workers and the determinants of variations in their distribution in South East in Nigerian

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Background The geographical distribution of health personnel refers to their spatial allocation and it determines which services, and in what quantity and quality, will be available. Imbalances raise problems of equity and efficiency. In Nigeria, PHC health workers are essential for the delivery of Public health interventions, but their distribution and reasons for such distribution is not well known. This is necessary because the health-related MDGs cannot be achieved if vulnerable populations do not have access to skilled personnel.

Objectives To document the distribution of PHC workers and the factors responsible for variations in their distribution in the Nigerian PHC system.

Methods This was a cross sectional exploratory study carried out in Anambra state southeast Nigeria using document review, IDIs with 5 policy makers and questionnaire survey with 610 health workers to elicit information on the geographical distribution of PHC workers and the determinants of variation in the distribution.

Results More than 60% of the PHC workers are in urban areas where less than 30% of the people live. The results also showed that the variations are the result of a mix of decisions and indecisions by individuals, communities and governments, which in turn are influenced by personal, professional, organizational, economic, political and cultural factors.

Policy Implications A good understanding of the dynamics and determinants of health worker distribution is needed to achieve an equitable and efficient distribution. It is necessary that both financial and non financial incentives to attract health professionals to otherwise unattractive locations be created. Government should also recruit workers from their areas of origin and train them in schools of Health technology and Nursing/Midwifery schools with a signed bond to work in their areas of origin for a specified period on graduation.