Evaluating the Impact of South Africa’s Ideal Clinic Realisation Programme using Quasi-Experimental Methods

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***Background***: South Africa is at present re-structuring its healthcare system with the aim of achieving universal healthcare coverage through a single-payer National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme. The NHI was introduced as one solution to inequalities within the South African health care system by creating ‘a unitary system, financed through a central fund, where patients can select from a package of care offered by accredited health facilities’. In preparation for the NHI, a number of reforms have been introduced to improve both access and quality of health care services in public health facilities. Given the importance of having a well-functioning primary healthcare system, these reforms have also targeted improvements and restructuring of the primary healthcare system. An important component of the primary healthcare reforms was the phased introduction of the Ideal Clinic Realisation Programme (ICRP) in 2014. This programme was accompanied by a wide range of initiatives aimed at improving the quality of primary healthcare services, particularly in more deprived areas. The ICRP targeted improvements in PHC administrative process; health service delivery; human resources for health; and infrastructure.

***Aim***: This aim of this study is to assess the impact of the ICRP on the quality of primary healthcare services.

***Method***: We use administrative data – the South African District Health Information System and apply quasi-experimental methods to assess the impact of the programme on amenable causes of death (a proxy for quality of health care services) and process indicators (including essential medication stock-out rate and patient safety incident cases). These quasi-experimental methods (difference-in-difference combined with propensity score matching) allow for the identification of causal effects of the programme on both population-level outcomes (amenable causes of mortality) and process indicators. This will provide useful insights to decision-makers on improvements to be made prior to full scale-up of the programme.