A critical analysis of healthcare purchasing arrangements in Kenya: A case study of the county departments of health.

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Background

Purchasing in healthcare financing refers to the transfer of pooled funds to healthcare providers for the provision of healthcare services. There is limited empirical work on purchasing arrangements and what is required for strategic purchasing in low and middle-income countries. We conducted this study to critically assess the purchasing arrangements of the county departments of health (CDOH) who are the largest purchasers of healthcare in Kenya.

Methods

We employed a qualitative case study approach to assess the extent to which the purchasing actions of the CDOH in Kenya were strategic. We purposively sampled 10 counties, and collected data using in-depth interviews (n=81), focus group discussions (n= 4) and documents review. We analyzed data using a framework approach.

Results

County departments of health did not practice strategic purchasing. The government’s (national and county) role as a steward for the purchasing function was characterized by poor accountability and inadequate budgetary allocations for service delivery. The absence of a purchaser-provider split between the CDOH and public healthcare providers undermined provider selection based on performance and quality. Poor public participation and ineffective complaints and feedback mechanisms limited public accountability and responsiveness to the needs of the people.

Conclusion

Our findings show that while there are frameworks that could promote strategic purchasing of the CDOH, strategic purchasing is impaired by poor implementation of these frameworks and the inherent weaknesses of a public integrated purchasing system that lacks purchaser-provider split.