Horizontal vs. Vertical: Challenges in Approaches to Global Health

Reading: Mass Campaigns Versus General Health Services: What Have We Learnt in 40 Years about Vertical Versus Horizontal Approaches?, Anne Mills

Discussion Guide

Goal: Explore vertical, horizontal, and diagonal approaches to global health care delivery and how to overcome some of the main barriers to successful implementation.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

1. How is global health usually funded and how does this relate to the type of initiatives that are implemented? What are the horizontal, vertical, and diagonal approaches to global health?

2. What measures could be taken to ensure that health systems are strengthened even in the context of a vertical program?

3. How can the focus on securing "limited" funding inhibit us from dreaming about what is possible in global health care delivery? What are some ways that this focus prevents us from working towards the overarching goal of delivering high quality health care to the poor?

Key Quotes:

"Problems [with the relative merits of vertical and horizontal approaches] included the very limited number of countries researched, the predominance of opinion pieces rather than empirical studies, and the poor study design" (316).

"Perhaps the one clear area where the nature of the debate has changed is the argument that general health services should focus on a limited set or package of cost-effective interventions. This can be seen as a middle way—avoiding the selectivity of the vertical approach, but seeking to ensure that general health service resources are devoted to interventions that are prioritized on the basis of their cost-effectiveness" (316).

"With respect to health workers, Gonzalez stresses the importance of ensuring that front-line workers in general health services feel fully part of the mass campaign, and of ensuring that they are not overburdened by demanding duties" (316).

Lesson Plan

Goal: To explore vertical, horizontal, and diagonal approaches to global health care delivery and how to overcome some of the main barriers to successful implementation.

Warm Up: List some ways (e.g. government grants, international organizations, private philanthropy, etc.) global health initiatives or research are financed. Consider the key pieces of information required to secure this funding. (Hint: consider metrics needed to prove effectiveness, goal setting, long-term health outcomes, etc.)

Diagnostic: At PIH, we always try to push back on the status quo of what is believed to be possible. How can the focus on securing "limited" funding inhibit us from dreaming about what is possible in global health care delivery? What are some ways that this focus prevents us from achieving the overarching goal of delivering high quality health care to the poor?

Teaching Bit: In global health, the terms "vertical" and "horizontal" are frequently used to describe a program's general approach and characterize the overarching goals of a program.

- **The Horizontal Approach**: according to the text, this approach "seeks to tackle the over-all health problems on a wide front and on a long-term basis through the creation of a system of permanent institutions commonly know as 'general health services'" (315). The goals of this approach might cut across specific diseases and focus on building health care systems that are able to tackle diseases in a long-term way.

- **The Vertical Approach**: according to the text, this approach "calls for solutions of a given health problem by means of a single-purpose machinery" (315). The goals of this approach might be to treat or eradicate a single disease by vaccination or disease-specific campaigns.

Although these have historically been two key approaches to global health, as stated in the text, "the two approaches should not be seen as mutually exclusive" (315). A third "**diagonal approach**" aims to accomplish disease-specific goals by means of health system strengthening. This approach has largely emerged due to funding mechanisms and more frequent investment in disease-specific vertical programs.

Guided Practice: One of the biggest ongoing challenges in global health is convincing funders that global health initiatives are worth investing in and will be successful. Because vertical programs often have objectives that are easier to measure (ex. halve the number of infected HIV patients by 2020), they are typically more easily funded.

As a group, compare and contrast vertical and horizontal programs. Consider: obtaining funding, implementing programs, tracking progress, sustainability, and achieving health outcomes.

Independent Practice: The text emphasizes the importance of "ensuring that front-line workers in general health services feel fully part of the mass campaign" (316). With a partner, discuss how integrating front-line health workers into mass campaigns could ensure that health systems are strengthened in the context of a vertical program. Think of other ways to use components of vertical programs to strengthen health systems—a "diagonal approach" to health care delivery.

Assessment: The text states, "problems [with promoting the service delivery approaches] included the very limited number of countries researched, the predominance of opinion pieces rather than empirical studies, and the poor study design" (316). In pairs, come up with three research questions that could help horizontal approaches to health care delivery secure funding.

Closer: How can we as PIH Engage challenge the status quo of funding in global health? (Think: what types of approaches are typically funded? Are there adequate funds available? Is it possible to change the status quo?)