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Research Article

Awareness and Utilization of PhilHealth's Primary Care Benefit and KonSulTa (YaKap) Program Among Barangay Health Workers in Rural Kalinga, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study looked at how aware Barangay Health Workers (BHWs) and their dependents are of PhilHealth's Primary Care Benefit (PCB) and KonSulTa (YaKap) Program, and how often they use these services and change their health seeking behavior for health services such as proactive enrollment, routine consultations, and early intervention. This study was conducted in the selected rural municipalities of Kalinga, Philippines. Although the program was created to strengthen primary health care under the Universal Health Care Act, the findings suggest that many frontline health workers are not fully informed about the program or are not able to access its services easily.

The study aimed to find out how familiar BHWs are with the different parts of the program and how often they use services such as enrollment, First Patient Encounter, medical consultations, diagnostic tests, and medicines. It also identified the common problems that prevent them from using these services. A total of 115 Barangay Health Workers (BHWs) were included in the study, which included structured questions and semi-structured interviews. Data were further subjected using cross-sectional descriptive research. Results revealed that awareness of the PCB/YaKap Program with 34.88% low awareness among respondents, limited utilization of 22.95%, and 76.18% have identified challenges, which includes inadequate information dissemination, procedural complexity, logistical challenges, inconsistent service availability, long waiting times and staffing limitations. The study also found that awareness and usage did not significantly differ based on age, sex, civil status, years of service, or educational background.

Overall, the findings show that problems in the health system and daily operations prevent BHWs from fully benefiting from the PCB/YaKap Program. To improve access and participation, the study recommends increasing health education, improving the capacity of

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Rural Health Units, and providing regular training for BHWs. These steps are important to ensure fair access to primary health care and to help achieve the goals of the Universal Health Care Act.

Keywords: *PhilHealth, KonSulTa Program, Primary Care Benefit (PCB), Barangay Health Workers, Health Service Utilization, Rural Health Care, Kalinga Province*

Introduction

One of the major problems in the primary healthcare in the Philippines is access to it, in example the introduction of PhilHealth's Primary Care Benefit (PCB) and KonSulTa (YaKap) Program. These programs were created to help prevent illnesses, detect health problems early, and provide basic outpatient services as part of the Universal Health Care Act. Barangay Health Workers (BHWs) play an important role in the community by guiding families and helping them access these health services. However, reports and assessments based from local health units and municipalities show that many people, including BHWs themselves, are not fully aware of the aforementioned programs. This situation raises concerns about limited health knowledge, difficulties in accessing services, and uneven readiness of the health system, especially in remote and underserved areas. Understanding these challenges is important to improve how the program is carried out, strengthen local health services, and ensure that everyone has fair access to primary healthcare.

Method

This study used cross-sectional descriptive research to examine the awareness in PCB/YaKap Program among BHWs in Balbalan

and Pinukpuk, Kalinga. Respondents were selected using stratified sampling, with total of 115 BHWs, selected among 37 barangays.

Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire, including their knowledge on the program, who can join the program, benefits, frequency of the services, and the problems they encountered. Further, to gain deeper understanding of the challenges faced by the respondents, semi-structured interviews were also conducted.

Results of the survey were tabularized and summarized using descriptive statistics. Further, ethical approval was secured by gathering informed consent from the respondents.

Results

There exists a clear gap among BHWs in their awareness of PCB/YaKap Program, this includes services offering, eligibility, and BHWs roles in promoting the programs within their communities.

Table 1 reveals many BHWs in the selected rural areas in Kalinga have limited awareness of PCB/YaKap. Only 34.88% agreed that they were aware of the program. Even fewer, or 22.95%, reported that they had used these services, despite being frontline health workers expected to guide and assist community members.

Table 1. Summary of Findings

Dimension	Computed Index (%)	Interpretation
Awareness	34.88	Low Awareness
Utilization	22.95	Low Utilization
Challenges	76.18	High Challenges
Suggestions / Interventions	96.43	Strong Support for Interventions

The table also reveals that most BHWs (76.18%) experience serious difficulties in accessing and using the program. Respondents agreed on the following challenges like

inadequate supplies and medicines, incomplete laboratory services, unclear procedures, lack of health staff, incomplete laboratory services and

medicines, long waiting time and difficulties caused by distance and location.

These challenges help explain why the program is not widely used, as system and logistical problems make it difficult for BHWs to actively participate in the program and encourage community members to avail of its services.

Discussion

The results show a clear gap between what the PCB/YaKap Program aims to achieve and what is happening in rural areas of Kalinga. The low level of awareness among BHWs needs immediate action for better healthcare awareness and utilization of PhilHealth benefits. It may be noted that the program is available, but many services are not being availed. Issues on providing and recording services are also challenges among BHWs. There are issues to be addressed for operations, including internet stability, delays in patient PhilHealth membership verification and reimbursement, lack of staff in RHUs, and dependency on supplies purchased by LGUs. These gaps may limit the capabilities of the local officials to make informed decisions based on data.

BHWs and LGUs are both vital in connecting communities to access the national primary care program, however limited training, lack of logistical support, and weak system coordination prevent them from fully using and promoting the program. Therefore, to ensure long-term success, training programs need to be strengthened, digital systems need to be improved, and processes need to be simplified to deliver services to the community effectively and efficiently.

Conclusion

This research aims to study the awareness and use of PhilHealth's PCB/YaKap program among BHWs in selected rural in Kalinga. The study revealed that there are low awareness and utilization among the respondents. Which is mainly due to long travel distance to the health facilities, long waiting time, internet stability, delays in patient philhealth membership verification and reimbursement, lack of staff in RHUs, and incomplete supplies and medicines.

To better achieve the goals of the Universal Health Care Act, BHWs need to be trained properly, foster health seeking behaviors like timely enrollment and consultations, strong support on digitalization, and simplified processes need to be considered. Addressing these issues can increase program participation, ensure fair access to primary healthcare, and help build stronger and more reliable health systems in rural areas.

Awareness and utilization of PCB/YaKap among BHWs in rural Kalinga are suboptimal due to systemic and operational barriers. Strengthening health literacy, enhancing RHU services, and building BHW capacity are critical to improving equitable primary healthcare delivery and supporting the objectives of the Universal Health Care Act.

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