HELPFUL HINTS

Expedited Data Quality Assessment

An expedited data quality assessment (EDQA) is a novel method of organizing patient records and cleaning data found in patient files and health facility registers. Its advantages are that it can be done in five to six weeks rather than several months, and can serve as an intervention by allowing for correction of the data when source documents are found to be incomplete or inconsistent.

This new method has been used when stakeholders (researchers, implementing partners, etc.) need to clean patient files and to use these files to determine what patients may have been lost to follow-up for completing HIV treatment and care.

EDQA is similar to standard data quality assessments (DQAs) but is more rapid and intense. An EDQA is conducted in two stages: a pilot or "mini" DQA in selected health facilities to diagnose data quality issues, followed by a data-cleaning intervention to address those issues. An EDQA also assesses the quality of select indicators and diagnoses data reporting challenges. During an EDQA, facility registers are compared to source documents, such as patient files, electronic medical records, and laboratory records.

Results from an EDQA can be used to inform strategies for decreasing patient loss to follow-up (LTFU), for improving site-level data quality, and for strengthening data management practices, such as supportive supervision and routine data quality. To decrease LTFU, an EDQA can identify patients who should be contacted through community outreach to encourage them to return for treatment. So far, EDQA has been applied in several countries to an HIV indicator (TX_CURR) that shows the number of adults and children currently receiving antiretroviral therapy. It could be adapted and applied to other HIV indicators, such as continuity of care, prevention of mother-to-child transmission, or similar indicators requiring data from multiple sources.

FIND ONLINE

A menu of tools for assessing data quality (including DQA and EDQA) can be found at https://www.measureevaluation.org/resources/publications/tl-19-26.

To help implementers know what to expect in an EDQA and to offer help on selecting sites for investigation, we offer the following recommendations.

☑ **How to choose sites.** Implementers should choose a mix of facilities of different sizes and with different capacity levels to provide a full picture of the existing data in a health information system (HIS). Facilities within the same system will differ in how they collect data (electronically or manually), how they store files, how they link data to individual clients, and the quality of human resources for training data collectors and supportive supervision. It is also important to select sites that provide the services of interest and, therefore, are collecting the indicator or data that the EDQA will assess.

☑ **Use Lot Quality Assurance Sampling (LQAS) to help determine if data quality issues exist that warrant a more exhaustive DQA.** LQAS is a rapid and inexpensive method that uses small sample sizes and frequent sampling to categorize and prioritize geographic areas based on their performance on select indicators. "Lots" are small units of a program area classified as meeting or not meeting target levels of data quality performance. Access guidance here: https://www.measureevaluation.org/resources/publications/ms-19-176. An LQAS triage tool is available here: https://www.measureevaluation.org/resources/publications/tl-19-51.

✓ **Know the country's standard operating procedures (SOPs), HIS forms, and data storage procedures.** Work with health ministries or other entities that prescribe standards for data collection. This will ensure that your assessment uses consistent indicator definitions, current SOPs for data collection and storage, and forms consistent with national standards. In some cases, implementing partners may dictate data collection tools and methods rather than national partners. One way to ascertain if you are aligned with current practice is to pilot the EDQA in two or three facilities.

✓ **Investigate indicator definitions.** Know the most recent HIS protocols. Know when data collection forms were updated; understand the most recent guidance from international groups and funders. Be aware that facilities may not have the most recent forms or know that indicator definitions have changed.

✓ **Use cheat sheets.** Use examples of existing data collection forms to train assessors on the data fields they should collect. This will improve efficiency and accuracy during an assessment.

✓ **Have a good line of communication while the assessment team is working.** Consider using an application such as WhatsApp or GroupMe to easily communicate with assessors. Ongoing communication will help you identify and address data collection and verification issues early and enable real-time updates from the field.

✓ **Be flexible.** Fieldwork is always unpredictable. Be prepared to make changes to your procedures and data collection tools as you work. Reliable communication with your team will help you adapt to changes quickly.

✓ **Look at an example of an EDQA application conducted in Zambia**, available here: https://www.measureevaluation.org/resources/publications/tr-17-228.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information, visit: https://www.measureevaluation.org/our-work/data-quality

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