

GINKS NORTHERN ICT4D SERIES

ICTs AND THE NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE SCHEME

The government of Ghana instituted the National Health Insurance Scheme as a way of improving the health delivery system of the country and more importantly assist the citizens have access to quality health care at a much reduced cost. The National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA) has the oversight responsibility to ensure that the scheme operates and renders quality services to its customers.

Welcoming the participants to the forum, Mr. John Stephen Agbenyo, the Director of Savana Signatures said issues of health are universal because it affects everyone either directly or indirectly and said that they should pay attention to the speaker since their questions and active participation will go a long way to help in modifying operations of the scheme.

He said the focus of the forum was to examine how much the National Health Insurance Authority integrates ICT into operations system the Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS) in partnership with Savana Signatures at its monthly ICT4D forum at the Tamale Regional Library discussed the use of ICTs in to enhance health delivery by the National Health Insurance Authority.

The speaker of the forum, Mr. Ndo S. Emmanuel, the Northern Regional ICT coordinator of National health Insurance Authority said that ICT is the bedrock upon which the National Health Insurance Scheme is built on because they see ICT as the only efficient way through which they can reach out to the million of Ghanaians in no time and at a very reduced cost.

He said that the NHIA has been able to Network all its ten Regional offices, 145 District Sites and over 714 Provider Sites to one Head Office and this has made both the sharing of data and data and communication online more feasible. He also said that they have set up verification centers in all the public health centers to ensure that patients' cards are renewed and up to date. Mr. Ndo said that frantic efforts are currently underway with the authorities of the Tamale Teaching Hospital to strengthen collaborations between the Health Insurance Authority and the various health centers and ensure that the hospitals create more entry points to attend to the various

patients' who visit the hospital since other health posts in the country have done that. He said when this is done then NHIA will also employ personnel to man such centers and this will eventually improve the general health delivery system in the North and Ghana as a whole.

On the challenges of the using ICT in their operation, he said that cost of operation and the lack of technical personal to man the hospital entry points. Lack of stakeholder participation, the provision of inaccurate information leading to the duplicate of patients' records, the Legal and security issues as well as data backlog are still some of the challenges they are grappling and trying to overcome.

He further lamented that even though the scheme has purchased some CIT equipment for health centers, most of these centers fail to take good care of the equipment and regretted that though the scheme has provided photocopiers and supply papers and for the photocopying of patients' cards, almost all the health centers are now asking patients' to make this photocopies themselves, which is unacceptable.

Mr. Emmanuel in ending his presentation said that the way forward in ensuring that there is up to date data of patients' at the health centers is the formation of closer collaboration between stakeholders to ensure judicious use of public resources. He also admonished various health institutions to embark on training and regular refresher courses for service providers and enhance awareness creation among health workers about ICTs so as to get them to accept ICT as an enabler and above all m get more commitment from the government in providing the necessary infrastructure

At the end of the presentation, some participants wanted to know why there are disparities in the payment of both the registration and renewal premium. In his response, Mr. Ndo_ said that they consider the economic status and the geographical location and said that the country and various districts has been zoned according some criteria. This he said explains why people residing in the regional capital or Metropolis pay more premiums than those in the rural areas. In another response to how wrong names and date of births on the insurance cards can be corrected, he urged them to go the various district offices and these will be rectified. Most of the participants were very grateful to GINKS and Savsign for organizing the forum and suggested that Mr. Ndo be invited again to one of the forums to elaborate more on pertinent issues regarding the Health Insurance Scheme.