Title: Wave Upon Wave: Fiji’s Experiments in Decentralizing Its Health Care System

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Introduction: Decentralization in the health sector has been widely implemented since the 1970s as a reform mechanism, with mixed results. This study reports on a desk-top analysis to compare Fiji’s two attempts at decentralizing its health sector and implications on key health systems functions.

Methods: Vrangbraek’s conceptual framework for characterising decentralisation is used to analyse the impacts of Fiji’s two decentralisation attempts on the health systems functions of planning, financing and delivery of health services.

Results: The first reforms were characterised by major restructuring through devolving Fiji’s health system. Political instability, along with limited acceptance, stalled its implementation, resulting in a delegated (not devolved) system. During this wave, there were significant changes to the functions of planning. The function of financing, however, remained centralized whilst the function of delivery was delegated to geographic regions. The second wave, a more focused effort, targeted hospital outpatient services in one division, with the aim of shifting those services to health centres. Incrementally implemented, this initiative resulted in a streamlined planning structure aligned with national planning. The finance function remained centralised; however patient co-payments were introduced for patients referred by private providers to the public system. The delivery function saw the most significant changes, with health centres strengthened to serve as the first point of contact for users in the Suva subdivision.

Discussion/Conclusion: Fiji’s incremental approach to decentralization could provide lessons for Asia-Pacific countries that have been unsuccessful in large scale decentralization reforms.

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