

Abstract

This was an interventional research project carried out to streamline the research allowance process at the Education, Training and Research Unit (ET&R), Ministry of Health. The unit is the focal point for the formulation of policies regarding health-related research and provides financial initiative to the relevant senior officers who conduct research. This project was carried out to identify the gaps in the existing research facilitation mechanism with a view to improving the efficiency, effectiveness and user friendliness of the research allowance process. It aimed to improve the knowledge of the research applicants thereby reducing revisits to the unit, reducing the cycle time of the process and increasing their overall satisfaction with the process. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used in the study. Qualitative techniques, which included focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, were used primarily to identify the gaps in the process and to design a suitable intervention. Quantitative techniques, such as self-assessment questionnaires were used to obtain baseline data and assess the effectiveness of the intervention. Based on the pre-intervention, literature review and comprehensive stakeholder participation a feasible intervention was planned and implemented. Three months after the intervention, a post intervention assessment was carried out using the same instruments. Undue delay in the process, the absence of all information, instructions and documentation as a bundle, inability to identify a liaison at the ET&R unit and non-availability of a feedback mechanism were identified as Ministry deficiencies while incomplete applications and illegible handwriting deficiencies of research applicants. The average total time taken to complete the full research evaluation (cycle time -T1 to T5) was 141 days with $SD\pm 53.3$ in pre-intervention. The package of interventions developed to streamline the process included a guideline that was published online, a process map, a document covering Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), online research allowance application and progress report forms in an editable format, a checklist, a SMS alert system. Increasing awareness of the research allowance process among medical and dental officers was done via trade unions. Staff training and the introduction of “Deadlines for completion at five stages/time intervals” in the research allowance process were carried out in order to increase knowledge and streamline the process. The project outcome demonstrated an increase in process knowledge, satisfaction and timeliness and a reduction in the resubmission rate. The intervention has improved the average total cycle time to 78 days with $SD\pm 31.9$, which was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). In conclusion the intervention addressed the issue of lack of knowledge

regarding the research allowance process by providing information online in an easily accessible bundle; it included a checklist for document submission, an online FAQ, a process map, published guidelines, application and progress report forms in an editable word file format. It addressed some of the process delays by reaching a consensus with the Secretary of Health and the Deputy Director General (ET & R) regarding deadlines for completion at five specified stages in the process. These measures have helped reduce the research allowance processing time from an average of 141 days pre intervention to 77.9 days post intervention. Key Words: Research Allowance, Guideline, Process Map, ET&R, and Ministry of Health