



The Role of Mobile Health Clinics in Enhancing Access to Primary Nursing Care: Review of Global Strategies and their Implications for Rural Healthcare Delivery

¹-Salma Mohammed Zaila, ²-Nadiya Khalil I Albariya, ³-Nouf Issa Masoud, ⁴- Mariam Nasser Hussain Karkaa, ⁵-Sultan Ali Mustafa Alasiri, ⁶-Salwa Shafiq Abualfaraj, ⁷-Ibtisam Hadi Alenazi, ⁸-Ameer Abdulkarim Alzabali, ⁹-Hanan Suliman Alrasheedy, ¹⁰-Nada Hamdan Ghamshi, ¹¹-Sahar Abdullah Alwahidi, ¹²-Amnh Mohammad Hadi, ¹³-Maher Sajdi Mashal Alotaibi, ¹⁴-Abdullah Salem Saeed, ¹⁵-Saud Nahi Alqasimi

¹ Ksa, Ministry Of Health, Al-Sahi Primary Care Center

² Ksa, Ministry Of Health, Security Forces Hospital Program

³ Ksa, Ministry Of Health, King Saud Medical City Riyadh First Health Cluster

⁴ Ksa, Ministry Of Health, Aidabe Phc

⁵ Ksa, Ministry Of Health, Aldarb Genral Hspital

⁶ Ksa, Ministry Of Health, King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Medical City

⁷ Ksa, Ministry Of Health, Security Forces Hospital

⁸ Ksa, Ministry Of Health, Maghnia Health Care Center

⁹ Ksa, Ministry Of Health, Riyadh Long Term Care Hospital

¹⁰ Ksa, Ministry Of Health, King Salman Hospital

¹¹ Ksa, Ministry Of Health, Riyadh, King Salman Hospital

¹² Ksa, Ministry Of Health, Al-Jouf Gathering

¹³ Ksa, Ministry Of Health, Almohamadia Primary Health Care- Riyadh The Riyadh Third Health Cluster

¹⁴ Ksa, Ministry Of Health, Wadi Al-Dawasir General Hospital

¹⁵ Ksa, Ministry Of Health, Hafar Al-Batin Health Center At East Al-Batin Health Cente

Abstract

Background: The increasing need for accessible healthcare services, particularly in rural areas, has led to exploring innovative approaches such as mobile health clinics. These clinics aim to bridge the gap in primary healthcare access, especially for underserved populations facing geographical and financial barriers.

Methods: This systematic literature review analyzed diverse studies from databases including MEDLINE, Scopus, and Google Scholar, focusing on global strategies to enhance access to nursing care through mobile health clinics. The review synthesized evidence from various contexts, emphasizing community health services, school-based healthcare, and telemedicine as effective modalities.

Results: The findings revealed that mobile health clinics significantly improve healthcare access in rural communities by delivering essential services directly to underserved populations. Key strategies identified include community engagement, inter-sectoral coordination, and integrating non-profit organizations, which collectively enhance service delivery and reduce health disparities. The review highlighted that these clinics not only provide immediate health services but also foster long-term community health initiatives and training for local healthcare workers.

Conclusion: Mobile health clinics represent a vital component in advancing universal health coverage by addressing the unique challenges faced by rural populations. By implementing community-oriented healthcare models, these clinics can effectively enhance the accessibility and quality of nursing care. Future

policies should prioritize the expansion and sustainability of mobile health initiatives to ensure equitable health outcomes across diverse populations.

Keywords: Mobile health clinics, primary healthcare, rural health access, community health services, universal health coverage.

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1. Introduction

Expanding services to remove obstacles to access is accomplished via universal health coverage (UHC). Universal health coverage, as stated by the World Health Organization (WHO), entails access to essential promotional, preventative, curative, and therapeutic health services for all individuals at a reasonable cost, while guaranteeing equitable access [1,2]. The phrase universal refers to the State's legal duty to offer healthcare to all people, particularly focusing on the inclusion of impoverished and marginalized populations [3].

Enhancing primary healthcare (PHC) is the most thorough, dependable, and effective method for advancing individuals' physical, mental, and social well-being, positioning PHC as a cornerstone of a sustainable health system for universal health coverage (UHC) and health-related environmentally friendly development objectives [4, 5]. Notwithstanding significant advancements in recent decades, there are unmet health demands among individuals throughout [6, 7]. A significant number of individuals, especially the impoverished, those residing in rural regions, and those in precarious situations, have obstacles to maintaining their health.

Geographical and financial barriers, insufficient financing, erratic medicine supply, and shortages of equipment and staff have severely constrained the accessibility, availability, and efficacy of primary healthcare services in several nations [8]. The recent Astana Declaration acknowledged the need for modifications in primary healthcare to effectively address existing and upcoming risks to the healthcare system. This proclamation emphasized the need to establish a need-based, comprehensive, cost-effective, accessible, efficient, and sustainable healthcare system for disadvantaged and rural people, enabling treatment to be delivered in more local and convenient settings according to their preferences [9,10].

Diverse creative strategies have been used globally to provide access to basic healthcare services in remote areas. Methodically gathering and integrating optimal experiences globally is crucial for proposing successful methods to enhance healthcare access in underdeveloped nations [8]. This literature analysis was conducted to identify essential strategies from worldwide experiences to improve access to primary healthcare services in rural populations. The results of this comprehensive literature review may assist healthcare practitioners, researchers, and policymakers in enhancing healthcare service delivery in rural areas.

2. Methods

We examined pertinent publications from MEDLINE, Scopus, Web of Science, WHO Global Health Library, and Google Scholar to get all types of evidence. A preliminary search of MEDLINE was conducted, followed by a study of the textual elements in the title and abstract, as well as the index keywords used to categorize the articles.

3. Access to PHC Services in Rural Areas

According to this literature review, among the most important ways to increase access to PHC services in rural areas are community health services or community-directed medical care actions, school-based medical care, student-led medical services, outreach programs or mobile medical centers, family health programs, empanelment, society health financing initiatives, telehealth, holistic health care, and collaboration with non-profit private sectors and NGOs. The proposed initiatives pertain to the four major pillars of primary healthcare: community involvement, inter-sectoral coordination, suitable technology, and the availability of support mechanisms. Furthermore, the recommended techniques are beneficial in

enhancing access to healthcare services for rural people [11]. Furthermore, the recommended techniques effectively address labor shortages and enhance the knowledge and skills of local health workforces within the rural healthcare system.

The capacity of a healthcare system to address the health demands of the population is mostly contingent upon the knowledge, skills, motivation, and allocation of personnel tasked with coordinating and providing health services. The findings of this analysis may enhance the health information system, which is a fundamental component of the healthcare system that promotes community participation by disseminating and using timely and trustworthy health information for rural communities. This analysis proposes solutions to mitigate health inequalities among rural populations, which are significant in Least and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs). Healthcare services are often unevenly distributed, with a significant concentration in large metropolitan centers. Consequently, rural populations encounter increasing health inequities, mostly due to inadequate policies, inefficiencies, subpar leadership, and governance within the healthcare system.

This research found that community health programs or community-directed healthcare interventions mitigate health inequalities by providing equitable access to health services in areas where socioeconomic and geographical barriers restrict health equity. Community health programs encompass the identification and prioritization of public health issues within a designated geographic region; the design and execution of public health interventions (including the establishment of community health centers, mobile clinics, and outreach initiatives); the provision of services (such as health education, screenings, social support, and counseling); the deployment of community health workers to encourage healthy behaviors; advocacy for enhanced care for at-risk populations; and collaboration with stakeholders to address community healthcare requirements [12-18].

The community-oriented primary healthcare paradigm, characterized by socially responsive medicine, enhances the healthcare system's rationality, accountability, appropriateness, and social relevance to the public. Thus, this model functions as a prototype for overhauling healthcare systems. Community-directed treatments are a pragmatic approach to enhancing the accessibility of interventions at the community level in rural regions. This technique is ideal in circumstances where there are cultural hurdles to executing treatments since this strategy is effective in generating ownership in the community. In-service and on-the-job training for community health workers, rigorous monitoring, government assistance, and program assessment are essential for enhancing the community health program [19-21].

This research concluded that school-based primary healthcare services are excellent methods for enhancing access to primary healthcare services. School-based health services provide a range of healthcare provisions to children, youth, and at-risk groups in a convenient and accessible setting, while indirectly enhancing leadership and governance. Science educators and homeroom instructors are essential in executing this plan. It affects the provision of preventive care, including vaccines, chronic disease management, and reproductive health services for adolescents. Comprehensive health services provided via schools enhance access to healthcare information [22-29].

Global access to education has expanded during the last century [30]. The elevated education rate is an advantageous chance to provide healthcare services to students in accessible locations and to communicate health messages to families. Previous studies indicate that school-based healthcare services enhance access to healthcare by augmenting the consumption of primary care, preventive treatments, and health maintenance visits [31,32]. It is essential to include science instructors, homeroom teachers, school administrators, students, communities, community health workers, and other stakeholders as primary participants or advocates in the school-based healthcare system to maintain its effectiveness. The health and education sectors must collaborate with the aforementioned stakeholders to strategize, execute, and assess progress. School-based healthcare services are advantageous in contexts with elevated school enrollment and restricted access to healthcare facilities. This technique serves as an alternate approach in regions where community health-seeking activity is minimal.

Utilizing medical and health science students in rural healthcare systems has been recognized as a pivotal technique to mitigate health disparities in rural regions, stemming from labor shortages and uneven distribution of healthcare resources [33-37]. A student-led health intervention serves as an alternate method to provide important healthcare services in communities experiencing a scarcity of healthcare professionals [38,39]. Students will acquire professional skills and competencies while delivering healthcare services to the community. Additionally, advantages for student learning include enhanced communication, teamwork, and leadership abilities [40]. Student-led health interventions provide enhanced access to services, extended duration for examinations and treatments, greater depth of health education, holistic and integrated healthcare, and complimentary health support. The involvement of medical and health science students in the rural healthcare system may raise ethical and competence concerns. Strategies such as meticulous oversight, the establishment of explicit procedures, and the inclusion of senior specialists in the team should be considered.

This comprehensive literature analysis concluded that outreach services or mobile clinics enhance access to primary healthcare service delivery in rural communities. In developing nations, the largest percentage of the population resides in rural regions without access to medical care. Rural communities commute to metropolitan areas to get specialized services. This indicates a preference for enhanced integration between primary and secondary healthcare services. Specialist outreach services or mobile clinics have emerged as a viable approach to address health inequities, provide access to healthcare services, and strengthen the capacity of local healthcare workforces. This technique is advantageous in circumstances with elevated demands at tertiary or referral hospitals and significant patient attrition within the referral system [41-47]. Nonetheless, the execution may be challenging. A robust healthcare system and money are required. Furthermore, the efficacy of treatment may be inferior to that of hospital-based services, and the impact on patients' health outcomes might be minimal [48]. Infrequent expert visits in remote regions may lack significant effects unless the services are sustained and supported by robust commitment at both national and local levels. Health policies should include outreach efforts, supported by robust leadership, healthcare finance, and the promotion of private initiatives to ensure the sustainability of these activities over time.

This review demonstrated that FHP is an exceptionally effective instrument for improving health in rural populations. The FHP has introduced an enhanced model of primary healthcare services aimed at delivering accessible, first-contact, comprehensive, and holistic treatment that is synchronized with other healthcare services. It yields favorable outcomes for enhanced availability, access to, and use of health services, as well as improved health metrics, including decreased infant mortality, better identification of neglected illness cases, and diminished health inequalities [49-51]. The FHP utilizes multidisciplinary healthcare teams. The team comprises a physician, a nurse, a nursing assistant, and full-time community health agents. Family health teams are structured based on geographic location. The teams are tasked with implementing public health initiatives [52]. The family health program serves as an alternate method within the rural healthcare system in circumstances of inequitable access to treatment, elevated hospitalization rates, diminished health-seeking behavior in the community, and inadequate case detection and reporting mechanisms. Notwithstanding these notable accomplishments, the FHP faces challenges such as difficulties in recruiting and retaining adequately trained physicians for primary healthcare delivery, significant disparities in the quality of local care, inconsistent integration of primary care services with secondary and tertiary care, and a sluggish adoption of FHP in large populations [53].

This research identifies empanelment as an optimal option for delivering integrated primary healthcare to achieve universal health coverage [54-58]. The objective of empanelment is to provide patient-centered healthcare services tailored to individual requirements, ensuring that each registered patient gets optimum treatment, regardless of their frequency of visits to healthcare facilities. Key actions in this methodology are the allocation of all patients to a healthcare provider panel; frequent updates of panel assignments; and the use of panel data for patient education and monitoring [58]. Empanelment allows healthcare systems to enhance patient experiences, decrease expenses, and improve health outcomes. Empanelment serves as an effective mechanism to provide four essential functions: initial accessibility, continuity,

comprehensiveness, and coordination [59]. Effective empanelment necessitates accountability for the health of a designated population, including the provision of healthcare services tailored to their health state, which is a crucial advancement towards people-centered integrated healthcare.

This analysis determined that community health financing initiatives, such as community-based health insurance (CBHI), enhance healthcare access in low-income rural areas. This technique effectively mobilizes household resources for health in low-income contexts. Community-based health insurance is an innovative approach to providing financial security against healthcare expenses. Enhancing access to excellent health care for low-income rural families is a successful approach. The presence of social capital within the community is a crucial component influencing the efficacy of Community-Based Health Insurance (CBHI) since social capital positively impacts the community's demand for insurance [60,61]. Furthermore, solidarity and trust among members are essential factors for the effective operation of a CBHI. Solidarity and trust motivate members vulnerable to danger to consolidate their resources for collective use. The affordability of premiums or contributions, technical arrangements established by the scheme management, timing of contribution collection, trust in the integrity and competence of the CBHI managers, and the quality of care provided through the CBHI, accessible to various population groups, are critical determinants influencing individuals' decisions to enroll in CBHI schemes [62,63].

This analysis identifies telemedicine as a viable alternative for delivering specialist treatment in remote areas. Telemedicine is an essential technology instrument for enhancing healthcare accessibility, optimizing care delivery systems, facilitating culturally competent outreach, advancing health workforce development, and improving health information systems [64-73]. Telemedicine serves as an excellent alternative to conventional healthcare in scenarios such as diagnosing prevalent medical conditions; addressing inquiries regarding home treatments for various health issues; conducting post-treatment evaluations or follow-ups for chronic care; accommodating holidays, weekends, late nights, or any circumstances where standard medical care is unfeasible; catering to patients unable to leave their residences; and assisting individuals who lack consistent access to pertinent medical expertise in their locality. Nonetheless, technical limitations pose significant obstacles to telemedicine, particularly in underdeveloped nations. Widespread issues with Internet connection and infrastructure access might diminish the advantages of this technique. Technological expenses may also be an obstacle. Moreover, health technology needs human competency for its use. Consequently, enhancing information communication technologies (ICT) and developing human capability in ICT are crucial for addressing the health requirements of rural areas.

This comprehensive literature evaluation determined that enhancing the role of traditional medicine addresses issues related to access to allopathic care. The incorporation of traditional medicine within the healthcare system will enhance coverage and accessibility to medical treatments. The significance of complementary and alternative medicine for health is unequivocal, especially regarding its contribution to health promotion and well-being. It further endorses local health workforces [74-79]. Integrating traditional healers into the public health system meets healthcare requirements [56,57]. Integrating TM into the public healthcare system presents significant challenges. It is widely believed that TM contravenes scientific methodologies on impartiality, measurement, coding, and classification [57]. Consequently, several researchers propose that traditional medicine (TM) and contemporary medicine function and evolve independently of one another. A significant problem for TM is the prevalence of documented instances of fraudulent healers and healing practices [57]. This method is often more practicable in regions where formal training in integrative medicine is accessible. Despite the challenges of integration, the health sector may use traditional healers as health educators or promoters via training and ongoing assistance. Traditional healers may also serve as facilitators in community-directed techniques. Traditional Medicine (TM) may be used within the primary healthcare system in instances when access to allopathic medicine is unavailable and when conventional treatments prove unsuccessful for illness management [60].

Collaboration with non-profit business sectors and NGOs has been recognized as a successful strategy to enhance the healthcare system in poor countries [11-18]. Governments in developing countries face difficulties in addressing the health needs of their populations due to financial limitations, insufficient human resources, and inadequate health infrastructure; thus, the private sector, particularly non-profit

entities, and non-governmental organizations can facilitate increased access to healthcare services through their resources, expertise, and infrastructure. Nonetheless, the involvement of an NGO in the operation may foster false expectations of health care, adversely influencing views of these services. Furthermore, records indicate that, in some cases, NGOs directed funding only to disease-specific programs (vertical programming) instead of broader investments (horizontal programming) [61]. Concerns exist that donor spending in developing nations is not only unsustainable but may also be deemed insufficient given the substantial healthcare burden. To prevent unrealistic expectations and dissatisfaction, and to enhance and maintain the population's trust in the organization, NGOs should function as integrally as possible within the existing framework and collaborate closely with the community they serve, ensuring that services are rooted in the locality. Furthermore, faith-based organizations contribute to health via illness prevention, health education or promotion, and community health development, in addition to providing psychological and spiritual care [19-24]. Religious groups may engage all sectors of rural people. Consequently, the integration of primary healthcare services, particularly health education and promotion, illness prevention, and community health development with religious groups enhances the provision of healthcare services. Collaborating with FBOs is an optimal approach in contexts where cultural and faith-based obstacles are prevalent, particularly in regions where access issues often stem from a scarcity of providers. Religious groups need comprehensive training in health promotion and health systems to effectively address local circumstances within the parameters of national policy. Furthermore, robust collaboration with government agencies is essential to maintain the initiative [65-68].

4. Techniques to enhance access to basic healthcare services

Numerous studies have shown one or more techniques to enhance access to basic healthcare services. Nevertheless, the tactics documented by various research are not aggregated, resulting in a lack of consolidated knowledge about effective methods to enhance access to the healthcare system. This systematic literature study was done to assemble viable solutions for enhancing access to healthcare services in rural populations. The evaluation proposes essential methods to enhance access to primary healthcare services in rural areas. The proposed techniques are applicable in nations experiencing a deficit of healthcare personnel and financial resources since they use locally accessible options. The local healthcare system must assess the available options in the area for adopting the proposed strategies and incorporate these strategies into the healthcare system to maintain their effects. Healthcare providers, academics, and policymakers may use the findings of this systematic literature review to enhance access to healthcare services in underserved regions. The techniques, derived from the experiences of many nations (both developed and developing), may encounter contextual disparities such as socio-economic, cultural, institutional, and geographical barriers in their implementation. Furthermore, some experiences are derived only from one or two nations. Consequently, strategy authors and implementers must account for these contextual obstacles or variations while adopting and executing various strategies.

5. Constraints of the research

This systematic analysis examines exemplary practices in primary healthcare service delivery from both developed and developing nations, identifying 10 essential strategies to enhance access to PHC services in rural areas. We further examined pertinent published and unpublished articles, dissertations, theses, discussion papers, and viewpoints from several sources, including MEDLINE, Scopus, Web of Science, WHO Global Health Library, and Google Scholar.

We only depended on internet resources to locate pertinent publications. We excluded locally accessible printed records. We also imposed restrictions on language. We omitted publications published in languages other than English. We assumed that access to printed documents and the inclusion of items published in languages other than English would yield more relevant articles. Moreover, since the methods are derived from the experiences of several nations (both developed and developing), there may be contextual disparities such as socio-economic, cultural, institutional, and geographical problems in implementing the recommended solutions. There was insufficient data for many papers, particularly reports, to assess their methodological quality. Readers should be aware that our research may have overlooked significant efforts

to enhance access to primary healthcare services, and the solutions mentioned are not exhaustive in enhancing access to such services. Additional successful solutions may exist that are not addressed in this analysis. Moreover, generalizability may be compromised when certain experiences are derived from just one or two nations. This evaluation emphasizes access rather than the quality of service provided.

6. Summary

This research delineated essential techniques derived from global experiences to enhance access to primary healthcare services in rural areas. These initiatives are useful in enhancing access to healthcare services in rural or distant regions. They may contribute to attaining Universal Health Coverage (UHC), diminishing health result inequities, and enhancing healthcare access for rural areas at their convenience. Consequently, integrating the pivotal methods recommended by this analysis into the healthcare system is beneficial for improving primary healthcare services and mitigating the effects of health disparities in rural regions. Nonetheless, the proposed solutions may be challenging to execute. Enhancing the quantity and capability of the healthcare workforce; fortifying the healthcare financing framework; optimizing pharmaceuticals and supplies; collaborating with diverse partners and communities; instituting a monitoring and evaluation system; fostering robust and dedicated leadership; and promoting private initiatives must be prioritized to effectively implement and sustain these strategies over time. Furthermore, policymakers, program planners, and implementers seeking to use the results of this analysis should recognize that these are not the only effective techniques for enhancing access to basic healthcare services.

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دور العيادات الصحية المتنقلة في تعزيز الوصول إلى الرعاية التمريضية الأولية: مراجعة استراتيجيات عالمية وآثارها على تقديم الرعاية الصحية في المناطق الريفية

الملخص

الخلفية: أدت الحاجة المتزايدة إلى خدمات الرعاية الصحية القابلة للوصول، خاصة في المناطق الريفية، إلى استكشاف أساليب مبتكرة مثل العيادات الصحية المتنقلة. تهدف هذه العيادات إلى سد الفجوة في الوصول إلى الرعاية الصحية الأولية، لا سيما بالنسبة للسكان المحرومين الذين يواجهون حواجز جغرافية ومالية.

المنهجية: حللت هذه المراجعة المنهجية الدراسات المتنوعة من قواعد بيانات مثل *MEDLINE* و *Scopus* و *Google Scholar*، مركزة على الاستراتيجيات المطبقة عالميًا لتحسين الوصول إلى الرعاية التمريضية من خلال العيادات الصحية المتنقلة. جمعت المراجعة الأدلة من سياقات مختلفة، مسلطة الضوء على خدمات الصحة المجتمعية، والرعاية الصحية المدرسية، وخدمات التطبيب عن بعد كوسائل فعالة.

النتائج: أظهرت النتائج أن العيادات الصحية المتنقلة تحسن بشكل كبير من الوصول إلى الرعاية الصحية في المجتمعات الريفية من خلال تقديم الخدمات الأساسية مباشرة إلى السكان المحرومين. وتم تحديد استراتيجيات رئيسية تشمل المشاركة المجتمعية، والتنسيق بين القطاعات، وإشراك المنظمات غير الربحية، والتي تعزز جميعها تقديم الخدمات وتقلل الفوارق الصحية. وأبرزت المراجعة أن هذه العيادات لا تقتصر على تقديم خدمات صحية فورية، بل تساهم أيضًا في مبادرات صحية مجتمعية طويلة الأمد وتدريب العاملين الصحيين المحليين.

الخلاصة: تمثل العيادات الصحية المتنقلة عنصرًا أساسيًا في تعزيز التغطية الصحية الشاملة من خلال مواجهة التحديات الفريدة التي تواجهها المجتمعات الريفية. ومن خلال تطبيق نماذج رعاية صحية موجهة نحو المجتمع، يمكن لهذه العيادات تعزيز إمكانية الوصول إلى الرعاية التمريضية وجودتها. وينبغي أن تعطي السياسات المستقبلية الأولوية لتوسيع المبادرات الصحية المتنقلة وضمان استدامتها لتحقيق نتائج صحية عادلة عبر مختلف الفئات السكانية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العيادات الصحية المتنقلة، الرعاية الصحية الأولية، الوصول إلى الصحة الريفية، خدمات الصحة المجتمعية، التغطية الصحية الشاملة.