Feasibility of Using Appreciative Inquiry to Improve Maternity Services in District Hospitals of Malawi

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Background
Improving the quality of maternity care in Malawi is one important way to address the significant burden of maternal mortality and morbidity faced by Malawian women. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) harnesses the energy and ideas of staff through a positive motivational organisational change cycle (figure 1).

Setting:
Three Malawian government hospitals:
• High risk postnatal ward of a referral hospital
• District hospital labour and postnatal ward
• Community hospital maternity ward

What we did:
• 11 meetings over 12 months
• All staff invited
• AI modified to fit around working lives
• Changes identified through field notes, meeting minutes, evaluation forms and staff interviews

Results:
Meetings & Cycle completed at each site. Each team chose a topic:

Referral Hospital: ‘Team Spirit’
District Hospital: ‘Infection prevention for good patient outcome’
Community Hospital: ‘Infection prevention’

The general successes and specific changes shown in figure 2.

Change seemed to be strongest when management was involved and depended heavily on committed champions

Conclusion
It is feasible to implement AI in maternity settings in Malawi, however the presence of committed AI champions seems to be important. The challenges faced within the health system necessitate realistic goal setting. When teams concentrate on things they can achieve and stay positive, changes can happen.

Reference: