

CHWs Experience of the COVID-19 Second Wave

By Patricia Makhubu

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At the beginning of this year CHWs were met with a dilemma and felt uncertainty about how to explain what is being called the wave of the coronavirus pandemic, as it came with a new variant said to come from South Africa. CHWs had to venture into their daily scope of work without any briefing of these new developments and in fear of their lives after hearing that this variant of the virus differs in symptoms to the initial ones. Until this day no workshop has been done with us. CHWs only hear from social media platforms that the new variant is a very dangerous kind.

CHWs have been in a position to witness the numbers of immediate deaths of family members and also members of the community. It has made them feel unsafe as not all facilities follow the COVID-19 protocols. In some facilities they still test CHWs and then order them to remain at work whilst waiting for their results. The contacts of positive cases are no longer tested, and they are told that they can come for testing only if they experience two or more symptoms. This compromises the lives of CHWs.

There has not been many cases of death of CHWs reported since the second wave begun, though we have several cases of CHWs who tested positive with minor symptoms in the Transvaal area. From the Siyahlola campaigns being done by the Forum to Mpumalanga and North West, it was reported one CHW in the North West lost their life due to this second wave.

CHWs are still doing COVID-19 screening campaigns in various allocated places, then testing is done afterwards these campaigns. The only challenge is when CHWs visit their household catchment areas, as they perform the COVID-19 screening and then have to refer potential cases to the clinic facilities they work in. In most cases the community is turned back from the clinic facilities due to equipment shortages and often the Sister who is supposed to perform the tests is sometimes on leave and there is no one else trained to do the testing duty.

The clinic facilities are not even ready for the rollout of the vaccine. It is even hard for CHWs to explain to the community that there is no space prepared for COVID-19 suspected cases. The community and CHWs are forced to tolerate the situation.

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