Measuring the efficacy of phone monitoring of travellers in quarantine in 2021 in Shefa Province

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Abstract

Background: In order to improve the efficiency and reduce the costs of quarantine processes, the Vanuatu Ministry of Health introduced the Vanuatu Electronic Traveller System in 2021. VETS was designed to guide travellers throughout the process of travel to Vanuatu. Prior to introducing VETS, quarantine monitoring was conducted face-to-face by health staff to assess potential COVID19 symptoms and evaluate well-being of travellers. Limited staff and resources meant this was an overly time-consuming and costly process. A key component of VETS therefore was to introduce phone monitoring instead. Travellers were called and assessed by Shefa Health staff a minimum of three times during their 14-day quarantine stay.

Methods: Here we evaluate the response rate of phone monitoring of travellers in quarantine recorded on VETS. During 2021, the "Quarantine Module" of VETS was used to collect and store travellers' quarantine monitoring responses including Symptoms Monitoring as well as Mental Health Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) monitoring for "Vulnerable" people. For our research, monitoring data was extracted from VETS aggregated and analyzed.

Results: Throughout 2021, a total of 3,893 travellers were registered on VETS. Out of these, 2,646 travellers were recorded on VETS as having been monitored for COVID19 symptoms at least once during their quarantine stay equating to a 68% monitoring response rate. Monitoring of Vulnerable peoples via MHPSS was slightly higher with 70% of people recorded as having been monitored at least once during their quarantine stay.

Discussion: The gap observed in monitoring response rates is indicative of some issues and challenges experienced with quarantine phone monitoring. Among other things, these include connectivity issues, incorrect phone numbers, non-responsive phones. This calls for a need to strengthen processes and systems for similar activities in the future. Despite these challenges, the benefits of phone monitoring outweigh the costly and time-consuming processes associated with face-to-face monitoring.