Evaluating the Efficacy of Training Programs for Community Health Workers in Rural Uganda

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Comments
Medical student Elizabeth Butler participated in this study as part of the Senior Scholars research program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

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Evaluating the Efficacy of Training Programs for Community Health Workers in Rural Uganda

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Abstract

• Background: The Ministry of Health and Ommended, a non-profit U.S.-based organization that works with international communities to provide basic health education, have partnered to provide health training to community health workers (VHWs) in rural villages in Uganda. The training is provided via an intensive five-day long session that introduces a wide variety of topics in basic health education taught by experts in the respective fields. The participants are selected by the local government based on their age, reliability, level of education and availability. On the first day, the participants are given a pre-test that evaluates their level of knowledge about the subjects that will be taught during the training sessions, and are given the same questions as a post-test on the last day of training. This is done to evaluate how much information the participants learned about basic health during the training. The participants are followed after this training by quarterly meetings, focus groups, and further, more specific, training sessions. We analyzed data from the pre- and post-tests to evaluate the amount of information learned through the training sessions and to also evaluate feedback from the focus groups.

• Methods: The study sample consisted of 110 participants who were asked to complete the pre- and post-tests. The pre- and post-testing test consisted of 49 multiple choice questions, written in Luganda, with a total possible score of 105. The pre-test was distributed to the participants on the first day of the training session. The question and the delivery of the exams were the same at both points in time. The grading of the tests was as follows: each correct answer received one point, incorrect answers received no points, and questions with more than one answer received no points. We compared the percentage of correct answers of the pre- and post-tests to determine any changes in knowledge as a result of the training session.

• Results: A total of 99 trainees were recruited to participate in focus groups. Focus groups were conducted three and six months after the original training session and involved free to test VHWs per session. Questionnaires were distributed to the groups and questions were read aloud with discussion about each topic. We asked the VHWs: 1) Have you noticed healthy changes in your community? 2) What changes have you noticed? 3) How does the community view a VHW? 4) What does the community view a VHT Member as an HC1? 5) Do people respect VHT Members more? 6) What type of support would make the work easier? 7) What challenges do VHT Members face? 8) What questions do the VHT Members have?

• Conclusion: The increased mean score of the post-tests indicates that the VHWs did learn basic health information during the training session. However, the improvement in score was not as notable as one would expect given the intense nature of the trainings and the baseline level of knowledge being somewhat low. The data from the focus groups, however, indicated that VHWs are creating positive change in their communities. This could mean that the simple act of appointing one person to educate their community makes them a responsible and reliable source of knowledge that they do possess, however basic it may be. It could also indicate that the VHWs learned most at the focus sessions rather than the test scores reveal. This shows that there may be a need to focus on understanding the impact of the test questions, difficulty with multiple choice questions, or difficulty applying knowledge in the test, especially considering that most of the VHWs were adults many years out of school. In light of this information, one could consider a different method of evaluation, and focus on the follow-up to assess what the VHWs are actually doing to help their communities. Moving forward, we would like to evaluate the villages themselves via a system of surveys that ask the villagers about changes they have or have not made and if they have seen any improvement in their health. This information will provide further evidence as to whether VHWs are an ideal model in the field of health education.

Background

Providers in public health have long since struggled to determine the best manner of disseminating information to communities. The idea of utilizing local community members to act as outreach health workers and educators has been tried by many and this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of this type of intervention. Ommended, in the midst of a large cohort study that will evaluate changes in health behavior and outcomes based on the presence of local community health workers.