



Assessing Community Interest in Health Education Through Short-term Medical Missions

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Introduction

Context: There are over 500 US based organizations sending medical students on short-term medical missions (STMM) abroad. Rising interest in global health (GH) over the past decade has prompted a surge in international volunteerism. This interest is fueled by desire to travel, learn new cultures, volunteer in low resource settings, and for some it serves as a preparation for a life-long career in GH. STMMs are variable in their scope, effectiveness, impact and sustainability, and from here stems the controversy surrounding them. Moreover, medical students role in STMMs tend to be the most ambiguous as their clinical and research training is limited. Many organizations have started to emphasize community interventions as a possible outlet for medical student enthusiasm.

Our focus: Refuge International (RI) is a non-profit organization serving in Guatemala; UT Southwestern medical students join for 1-week STMMs to rural areas. As a qualitative improvement project we aimed to assess community interest in health education.

Methods

A survey was designed with 5 open and closed-ended questions addressing what health-related issues community members would like to learn and know about. Inclusion criteria were patients older than 21 attending the health clinic in Chocoma, Guatemala. The questions were translated to and asked in Spanish. Their responses were collected and analyzed through Survey Monkey for frequency analysis.

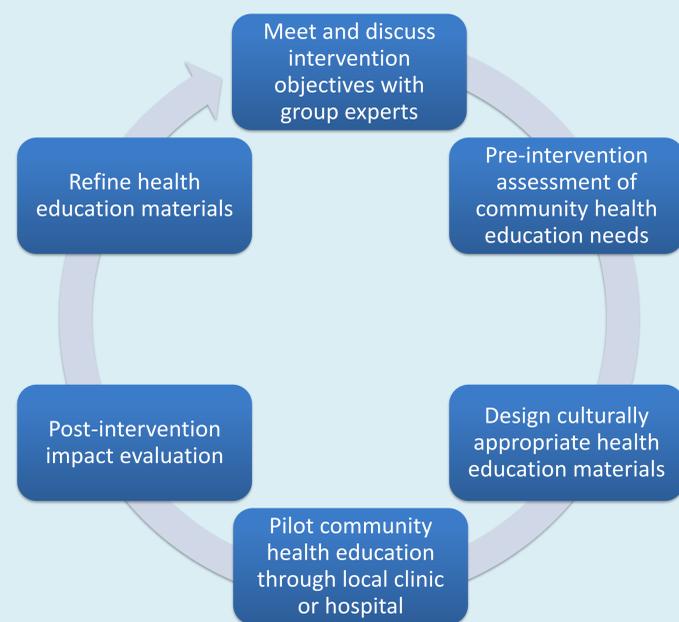
Results

- 13 patients were surveyed
- For the initial survey question, 85% of patients surveyed reported having a specific health topic they would like to learn more about. Of these, 45% of responses entailed learning about basic health maintenance and first aid care.
- Upon prompting for 19 specific health conditions and topics, 11 out of 19 health topics had 100% of patients showing interest in learning more about them. 4 out of 19 health topics had 92% patient interest; 3 out 19 health topics had 85% interest; lowest interest was 77% interest for 1 out of 19 topics. See Table 1.
- When allowed to state any additional health topic not listed that they would like to learn more about, 61.5% of patients listed an additional health topic.
- 89% of patients that have visited the RI clinic rated their experience and clinic visit 5 out of 5., with 5 being the highest rating. 11% rated their experience 3 out of 5.
- Within 10 years, the most important changes patients wish to see in their community are improvement of health access and care (61%), improved roads (17%), and decreased crime and violence (11%).

Patient Interest in Specific Health Topics Prompted			
Health Topic	Percent Interest	Health Topic	Percent Interest
Hypertension	85%	Malaria	77%
Diabetes	92%	Pelvic Pain	100%
Gastritis/GERD	92%	Arthritis	100%
Ulcer Disease	85%	Gallbladder Disease	100%
Headaches	100%	Urinary Tract Infection	100%
Cancer	85%	Child Health	100%
Stroke	100%	Fever in Children	100%
Heart Attack	100%	Worm Infections	92%
Dengue	100%	Nutrition	92%
Chikungunya Virus	100%		

Table 1. Patient Interest, Question 2.

Figure 1. Designing community health education activities



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Conclusions

Patient responses showed willingness and curiosity for learning more about a variety of health care topics. Patients demonstrate a desire to be more involved in the wellbeing of both themselves and community thus this opens an avenue to explore ways to engage the patients via health education efforts in the future.

Our QI project emphasizes the need to continue exploring community interventions as effective and sustainable methods to engage eager medical students on STMMs. Though our project addressed the early needs assessment phase of a patient education community intervention, we propose the following model for medical students to lead and design patient education community interventions (Figure 1). Each phase can be conducted on consecutive STMMs with the organization unifying these phases.

Moving forward:

- Share results with the local community and future medical student groups
- Design brochures on topics identified
- Test pilot brochures on following trips

References

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