Developing Health Education for Community Health Workers and Refugees in Cleveland

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Background

With the goal of learning how to create and present health education materials for multicultural populations, my practicum was completed through Partnership for Good Health (PGH). PGH is a local nonprofit organization which empowers a workforce of community health workers to assist asylum seekers in Cleveland to overcome the linguistic and cultural barriers that often impede refugee healthcare.

Population

The term refugees encompasses those who have been forced to flee their country due to persecution, war or violence (UN Refugee Agency). Coming from high-stress environments and living in limited resource settings, such as refugee camps, refugees often experience larger acute and chronic disease burden upon resettlement (Morris et al., 2009). Language and communications present in multiple levels of interaction with healthcare systems - schedulers may not speak the same language, difficulty filling out paperwork, lacking a signature, writing their own names. Additionally, during the appointment, there may be many misunderstandings and miscommunications.

By assisting and overseeing the scheduling of appointments and providing transportation, they can enable maintained wellness through continuous interaction. Community health workers can understand cultural beliefs and provide relevant explanations, improving health literacy in a familiar mode.

At the time of my practicum, Partnership for Good Health employed 6 community health workers who worked with the following linguistic populations:
- Pashto (Afghanistan)
- Dari (Afghanistan)
- Nepali (Bhutan/Nepal)
- Arabic
- Swahili
- Kidembe (Democratic Republic of the Congo)

Learning Objectives

1. Cultural barriers to healthcare among refugee populations
2. Duties of community health workers in Cleveland and the dynamic experiences of local asylum seekers
3. Linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic issues faced by local refugee populations

Activities

During my practicum, I completed research remotely on major issues in healthcare for refugee populations. This information was used to construct the education modules presented at each monthly staff meeting. I interviewed each community healthcare worker individually to understand more about their role and backgrounds. I also met weekly with Sara Doran RN, CDE, to discuss my objectives and other ways I could assist Partnership for Good Health.

• One-on-One Interviews with each member of staff, including every community health worker
• Presentation on Preventive Care
• Presentation on Mental Health
• Presentation on Hypertension
• Presentation on Breast Cancer Screening
• Attendance of all monthly staff meetings since June
• Interviewed Dr. Prakash Ganesh, a Neighborhood Family Practice Physician, to learn about pertinent issues in refugee healthcare that should be addressed in health education
• Development of a Breast Cancer Screening Questionnaire
• Developing a Hypertension Pamphlet

Deliverables

• Developing a Hypertension Pamphlet
• Development of a Breast Cancer Screening Module
• Attendance of all monthly staff meetings
• Presentation on Breast Cancer Screening
• Presentation on Hypertension
• Presentation on Mental Health
• Presentation on Preventive Care

Public Health Implications

For the client population of Partnership for Good Health, it is important that the community health workers who assist them, who are often members of the refugee community themselves, are educated with proper information on basic healthcare issues so they can provide accurate and reliable information. PGH’s work is an incredible and essential resource for refugee populations in Cleveland.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Sara Kelly Doran RN, CDE for her constant guidance and all the community health workers at PGH - Dhan, Nikisha, Zaki, Feza, Samir, and Suralia - for being so welcoming and accepting me into their workplace. I would also like to thank Nagina Zar Alam for her assistance in developing some of the educational presentations for the staff meetings. Finally, my sincerest gratitude goes to Andrew Morris, MPH, for helping me find this amazing organization and answering all of my queries while completing my practicum work.

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