



ISSN: 2456-4419

Impact Factor: (RJIF): 5.18

Yoga 2018; 3(1): 84-86

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www.theyogicjournal.com

Received: 12-11-2017

Accepted: 13-12-2017

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Health education as a tool for improving health service: Delivery and outcomes

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Abstract

Health education is a profession of educating people about health. Areas within this profession encompass environmental health, physical health, social health, emotional health, intellectual health, and spiritual health. Education for health begins with people. It hopes to motivate them with whatever interests they may have in improving their living conditions. Its aim come is to develop in them a sense of responsibility for health conditions for themselves as individuals, as members of families, and as communities. Health education is also an effective tool that helps improve health in developing nations. It not only teaches prevention and basic health knowledge but also conditions ideas that re-shape everyday habits of people with unhealthy lifestyles in developing countries. This type of conditioning not only affects the immediate recipients of such education but also future generations will benefit from an improved and properly cultivated ideas about health that will eventually be ingrained with widely spread health education. Health educators must be aware of the various barriers of communication and cultural background of the community. The present paper covers the role of health education and health service providers as a tool for improving health services.

Keywords: Health education - objectives, characteristics, methods

Introduction

What is Health Education?

Health Education is one of the components of Health Promotion. The other two components are services improvement and advocacy. Health education service is the focal point for health promotion programme. The reason for this is that the principles and methods of health education are being frequently used in all other aspects of health promotion.

Health education is also very crucial to the attainment of the millennium development goals (MDGS).

Health education can be defined as any combination of learning opportunities designed to facilitate voluntary adaptation of behaviour which will improve or maintain health.

Health education can also be defined as the process by which people acquire knowledge, attitude and behaviour which promote their health and aid them in making wise decisions to solve personal, family and community health problems.

Objectives of Health Education

The aim of imparting health education to children is mainly to help them develop a sound physique and also to acquaint them with the laws of health, Highlighted below are a few of the objectives of health education:

- To cultivate the desirable health practices and health practices and health habits;
- To develop the health attitudes;
- To appreciate the health programmes undertaken by the school and community and to improve the school and community and to improve the necessary materials for the execution of that programme;
- To develop health consciousness in the school and in the community;
- To teach pupils the rules for the preservation and development of their physical, mental and emotional health;
- To eradicate the diseases through health drive programmes;

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- g. To combat the superstitions and prejudices in the community;
- h. To provide a healthful environment for physical and mental growth;
- i. To improve the general conditions of living in the community;
- j. To instruct the children and youth so as to conserve and improve their own health;
- k. To influence the parents and other adults through the health-educative programme for better habits and attitudes in children.

Characteristics of Health Education

Today's state-of-the-art health education curricula reflect the growing body of research that emphasizes teaching functional health information (essential concepts); shaping personal values that support healthy behaviours; shaping group norms that value a healthy lifestyle; and developing the essential health skills necessary to adopt, practice, and maintain health-enhancing behaviours. Less effective curricula often overemphasize teaching scientific facts and increasing student knowledge.

Reviews of effective programs and curricula and input from experts in the field of health education have identified the following characteristics of an effective health education curriculum.

1. Focuses on clear health goals and related behavioural outcomes.
2. is research-based and theory-driven.
3. Addresses individual values and group norms that support health-enhancing behaviours.
4. Focuses on increasing personal perceptions of risk and harmfulness of engaging in specific health risk behaviours and reinforcing protective factors.
5. Addresses social pressures and influences.
6. Builds personal competence, social competence and self efficacy by addressing skills.
7. Provides functional health knowledge that is basic, accurate, and directly contributes to health-promoting decisions and behaviours.
8. Uses strategies designed to personalize information and engage students.
9. Provides age-appropriate and developmentally-appropriate information, learning strategies, teaching methods, and materials
10. Incorporates learning strategies, teaching methods and materials that is culturally inclusive.
11. Provides adequate time for instruction and learning.
12. Provides opportunities to reinforce skills and positive health behaviours.
13. Provides opportunities to make positive connections with influential others.
14. Includes teacher information and plans for professional development and training that enhance effectiveness of instruction and student learning.

Methods for imparting Health Education

Health Education involves communication of health information/messages to the learner (audience) through the following methods:

- Lectures, symposium, and seminars, workshops
- Short health talks, interview
- Drama sketches, role playing, and use of songs
- Demonstrations
- Field studies and observational trip

To deliver a successful health education programme, the health education specialists should make use of IEC (Information, education and communication) materials. The word IEC is now changed to BBC (behaviour change communication). These materials include:

- Leaflets/flyers
- Posters, diagrams, banners, bill boards, wall charts, pictures, photographs, etc
- Real objects
- Audio-visual, such as television, radio, video tapes
- Newspapers, journals, periodicals, etc

The Roles of Various Workers in Health Education

The following categories of people should perform certain roles in improving health services delivery and outcomes

1. Teachers- their roles include giving short health talks to the students and pupils under them on observing/obeying simple rules of health/hygiene that will promote their health
2. Health service providers such as nurses, doctors, physiotherapists, dentist, pharmacists, etc. Their roles include :-
 - (a.) Carrying out patient education which involves
 - (i) Educating pupils, students, community members and patients on drug compliance
 - (ii) Recognition of signs and symptoms of diseases so that they report to the hospital at the early stage of illness
 - (iii) Counselling the family members/relations of a patient to give him/her full support until he/she completely recovers from treatment given
 - (iv) Counselling students, pupils and community members to desist from self-meditation
 - (b.) Advocating and sensitizing the policy-makers and stake holders to provide logistic supports to enhance improvement of health service delivery to the community members. These supports include releasing adequate funds to build and equip hospitals and health centres for the community members. It also includes employing qualified health professionals and pays their remunerations promptly
3. The dentist should always give oral hygiene education to students, pupils and community members. The education should include care of the teeth, recognition of signs and symptoms of dental problems (e.g., calculus, gingivitis, and dental cares). His/her role also involves advising the patient, community members to always come for routine check for their teeth at recognised dental clinics nearest to them
4. The health education specialist performs the following roles:
 - (i) Taking part in the enlightenment campaigns on ways of prevention and control of diseases/illness in the schools and among community members
 - (ii) Programme planning and evaluation of health education in schools and in the community at large
 - (iii) Organisation and promotion of health education activities in schools and communities
 - (iv) Rendering expertise services in the development of relevant Information, Education and Communication (IEC) or Behavioural Changes Communication (BCC) materials. These materials includes posters, banners, health messages, advertisement slot for media houses, leaflets/flyers
 - (v) Assist in the formation of a health team that will be saddled with the responsibility of addressing health problems in the community

- (vi) As a member of a health team, taking part in effective communication of useful health messages to target audiences such pupils, student, community members, etc. This involves the use of appropriate BBC/IEC materials as listed in (iv)
- 5. Nutritionists- give nutrition education to patients, pupils, students, school personnel and community members which can promote their health.
- 6. Environmental Health Officers/Sanitary Inspectors:- these people carry out regular inspection of the houses, schools, public places to give advices on environmental sanitation.

Conclusion

At present in our country much attention is being paid to the education for total health. Good health is a pre condition for good education. There is a saying that sound mind lives in a sound body. So, education cannot be acquired without the proper frame of the mind and proper frame of mind cannot be possible without proper health and hygiene. Realizing the importance of health education Secondary Education Commission, 1952-53 stated: "Unless! Physical education is accepted as an integral part of education and the educational authorities recognize it, need in schools the youth of the country, which form its 'most variable asset, will never be able to pull their full weigh to national welfare. The emphasis so far has been more on the academic type of education without proper consideration being given to physical welfare and the main-tenance ' proper standards of health of the pupils". Health education is the very foundation of every successful public health programme so one of the main functions educations should be to help every child deve-lop a healthy body, an alert mind and sound emotional attitudes. Health education aims at bridging the gulf between the health knowledge and health practices of the children. From the above discussion, if health education is given proper attention, it will go a long way in improving health service delivery and outcomes in the community.

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