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Health education as a tool for effective primary health care services

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Abstract

Health education is 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. Quality health is a fundamental right of all citizens. This can only be achieved through effective health care services. The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of health education as tool for effective primary health care services. The paper discussed the concept of health education, challenges of effective primary health care services, components of primary health care and the need for health education in the primary health care system. In conclusion, the practice of primary health care services cannot be effective without proper implementation of health education. It is therefore, recommended that government at all levels should ensure that health education and well trained health educators should form a part of medical team for promoting effective primary health care services.

Keywords: Health, health education, primary health care services

Introduction

Education for health begins with people. It helps to motivate them with whatever interests they may have in improving their living conditions. Its aim is to develop in them a sense of responsibility for health conditions for themselves as individuals, as members of families, and as communities. In communicable disease control, health education commonly includes an appraisal of what is known by a population about a disease, an assessment of habits and attitudes of the people as they relate to spread and frequency of the disease, and the presentation of specific means to remedy observed deficiencies.

This type of conditioning not only affects the immediate recipients of such education but also future generations will be benefited from an improved and properly cultivated ideas about health that will eventually be ingrained with widely spread health education. Moreover, besides physical health prevention, health education can also provide more aid and help people deal healthier with situations of extreme stress, anxiety, depression or other emotional disturbances to lessen the impact of these sorts of mental and emotional constituents, which can consequently lead to detrimental physical effects.

Health is an important aspect of human life. It encompasses all activities aimed at ensuring the protection of the body from diseases and promoting good habit. According to World Health Organization (WHO, 1947) ^[9], Health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being of individual and not the mere absence of diseases or infirmities. To achieve all these variables and to make individuals healthy, health education has an important role to play.

According to WHO (2008) ^[10], primary health care is described as an essential health care system based on practical, scientifically sound and socially acceptable method and technology, made universally accessible to individuals and families in the community, through their full participation and at a cost that the community can afford at every stage of their development in the spirit of self-reliance and self-determination. The goal of the National Health Policy (1987) ^[11] is to bring a comprehensive health care system based on primary health care that is promotive, protective, preventive, restorative and rehabilitative to all citizens within the available resources so that individuals and communities are assured of productivity, social

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well-being and enjoyment of living. The health services, based on Primary Health Care among other things are education concerning prevailing health problems and the methods of preventing and controlling them, promotion of food supply and proper nutrition, maternal and child care, including family planning, immunization against the major infectious diseases, prevention and control of locally endemic and epidemic diseases and provision of essential drugs and supplies (Adeyemo, 2005)^[3].

Concept of Health Education

Health Education plays a crucial role in the development of healthy, inclusive and equitable social, psychological and physical environment. It reflects current best practice, using an empowering, multi-dimensional, multi professional approach which relates to all setting, organizations, including the community, schools, health services and the workplace (Gordon, 2008)^[12]. Health Education helps to provide health knowledge, enhance wellness behaviours, promote health situations, facilitate healthful relationship and enables community members make responsible decisions. The Joint Committee on Health Education and Promotion Terminology (2001)^[13] defined Health Education as any combination of planned learning experiences based on sound theories that provide individuals, groups, and communities the opportunity to acquire information and the skills needed to make quality health decisions.

Health Education at the Primary Health Care (PHC) level help to address issues related to disease prevention; consumer health, environmental, emotional, sexual health, first aid, safety and disaster preparedness, substance abuse prevention, human.

Challenges of Effective Primary Health Care Service

The government is committed to quality and accessible public health services through provision of primary health care in rural areas as well as provision of preventive and curative services. PHC is provided by local government authority through health centers and health posts and they are staffed by nurses, midwives, community health officers, health technicians, community health extension workers and with physicians.

Other challenges facing effective primary health care services are lack of health education in the rural communities, poor facilities and equipment such as bad or inadequate vehicles for transporting the health workers for immunization services, inadequate finances for day to day running of PHC services because most of the internally generated revenue of local government is meager and insufficient for effective PHC services (Adeyemo, 2005)^[3].

Components of Primary Health Care

The essential components of primary health care observed by WHO (1987) are; health education concerning, prevailing health problems and the methods of preventing and controlling them; promotion of food supply and proper nutrition; adequate supply of safe water and basic sanitation; maternal and child health care, including, family planning; immunization against major infectious diseases, prevention and control of local endemic and epidemic diseases, appropriate treatment of common diseases and injuries; and provision of essential drugs and supplies.

Health Education as a Tool for Effective PHC Service

Health education is the process of persuading people to accept measures which will improve their health and to reject those

that will have an adverse effect. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine the influence of health education on effective primary health care services.

Government and other stakeholders on health has made tremendous efforts in improving the life and health of its citizens by creating health facilities such as provision of portable water supply, good sanitary and waste disposal, good roads network and provision of primary health services which are mostly equipped with health personnel such as physicians, nurses, lab attendant, nutritionist. All these provisions are more effective in the urban areas than its rural counterpart as a result of health education provided via audio, visual and audio visual media which makes the urban dwellers to have more information about the usefulness of these facilities.

Role of Health Education in Primary Health Care Services

Health education plays the following vital roles in the implementation of primary health care components. Johnson (2010)^[4], identified the roles as; immunization, maternity services, child health, communicable diseases control, environmental health, nutrition, school health services, first aid services, drug education, accident prevention and emergency services, aid family life education.

Recommendations

Having identified the importance of health education as a tool for effective PHC system, the following recommendations are suggested;

1. Government at all levels should ensure that health education and well trained health educators should form part of the medical team in the PHC centers
2. There is the need for maintenance of minimum health standard, improved housing condition, adequate potable water supply, environmental sanitation and food supply for the sustenance of good health condition.
3. Health education should be provided for the community members so as to make informed health decisions and also ways of preventing communicable disease.

Contribution to knowledge

In line with the theme of the International Conference this paper will contribute to knowledge in the following capacities.

1. It improves the health of the community dwellers and alleviate their poverty by educating them on the usefulness of PHC giving a sound mind in a sound body and health serves as an integral part of overall development.
2. It gives priority to improved living condition of the people beyond the present poverty level, so as to enhance better healthy living.
3. All the various components of primary health care services can only succeed if they are widely accepted by the individual and the community. Health education is of more significant tool in primary health care services because individual behaviour now has a greater effect on his health. (Brian, 2008)^[5].

In India, the methods of disseminating health education to the people can be described as still very low especially to the mostly affected areas which are the rural areas where there are poor electric supplies and make it difficult to listen or watch health information on electronic media.

The role of health education is to convince the community and individuals of the importance of health and services

rendered by the PHC. One of the best ways to achieve effective PHC is to ensure that the educating role becomes spread out and the end effect will be equally widespread throughout the population.

Need for Health Education in the Primary Health Care System

WHO, 2008 ^[10] identified five major needs for health education in PHC and these needs include the following:

1. **Improved Health:** Health education helps people improve their health in all stages of life. This health educator do by visiting communities to give health talks as well as voluntary counseling on how to improve health and live a disease free life.
2. **Improve Decision-Making:** It helps people make better health decisions. To do so, the health educator often tailors their message to the group they are educating. It explains the risks of unhealthy habits like smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and unprotected sex.
3. **Fight Diseases:** The goal of health education at the primary health care system is to minimize the occurrence of life-threatening illnesses. For example, the risk of diabetes and heart diseases can be lessened with proper diet and exercise.
4. **Fight Misconception:** Health education helps to correct some misconception that affect people's health. For example, where people believed that immunization is a means of putting an end to child bearing (Family planning) can be corrected through health education.
5. **Provide Resources:** Health Educators provide educational resources in the form of fliers carrying health messages, posters and pamphlet. It also creates awareness on health services that are available for free or at minimal cost.

Conclusion

The practice of primary health care services cannot be effective without the inculcation of health education. Involvement of trained health educators in the planning and implementation of primary health care system will help to remove obstacles to the effectiveness of PHC. There is need for a national approach to health educator to enhance behavioral change.

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