Pharmacy Students’ Use of Community Radio for Health Promotion and Education at the University of Limpopo, Turfloop Campus

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The objective of the project was to promote learning for pharmacy students beyond the classroom by transferring their knowledge to the community. Using the campus-based radio station, Radio Turf FM, the University of Limpopo Pharmacy Students’ Association (ULAPS) presented a weekly health talk on a variety of subjects, including the role of the pharmacist, heart attack, first aid, adherence to drugs, tuberculosis and contraception. The ULAPS talk show was aired live on Wednesday evenings between 20H00 and 21H00. The topics were chosen for their relevance to the target audience, their importance to the health of the community, and the benefit that might accrue from increased community awareness thereof. Where applicable, the discussions emphasised the preventive measures for the conditions and the non-pharmacological management of chronic conditions in addition to the drug treatment. The response received since the launch of the ULAPS radio talk show has been positive and plans are underway to broaden the participation to include other health science students, lecturers and other professionals in the next academic year.

1. Introduction

South Africa is facing a quadruple burden of disease, with diseases of poverty, emerging diseases of lifestyle, trauma and HIV/AIDS (Bradshaw et al, 2002). For most of these conditions, preventive measures, based on sound knowledge are the best approach. The WHO, for instance, notes that mortality and morbidity due to road injuries could be markedly reduced with proper education of the population and road users on safety measures relating to vehicle, road and human factors (WHO, 2004). At the launch of the 2005 Pharmacy Week on 7 September, the Limpopo Provincial Department of Health revealed the statistics on different diseases affecting the youth and the older population in South Africa today, with a challenge to all health care professionals, at whatever level, to get more involved in educating the population.

The pharmacy programme at the University of Limpopo (Turfloop Campus) started in the 1960s, at the then University of the North. The University of Limpopo Pharmacy Students’ Association (ULAPS), among other things, is responsible for organising community outreach programmes. ULAPS outreach programmes have hitherto been largely targeted at rural, disadvantaged communities outside the University. In 2005, the association directed its attention to the need for accurate health information within the university community. To this end, ULAPS forged a partnership with the community radio at the Turfloop Campus, Radio Turf FM, to provide a medium for information dissemination on a variety of issues.

Radio Turf FM is a 24-hour community radio broadcasting from the student centre at the Turfloop Campus. The station broadcasts on 103.8 MHz, with a reach radius of 97 km and an estimated community audience of more than 250,000. It targets mainly the young and upwardly mobile population aged 16-39 years, and is a popular station among the university community and the surrounding population. The above considerations made it an ideal medium for ULAPS to use to disseminate health-related information, with emphasis on the preventive aspects of illnesses and the recognition of conditions needing emergency and urgent treatment.

2. What was done

2.1 Preparations

Preparations included detailed discussions with the management of the radio station, where the intentions of the association were clearly spelled out. An agreement was reached on which time slot would be allocated to ULAPS to conduct health talks, which was
The first show also emphasised to the community that as patients they have the responsibility to be reasonable and courteous, not to expect their pharmacist to participate in dishonest practices such as defrauding their medical aid, to assist their pharmacist in complying with legal requirements relating to medicines such as prescription only drugs, to use medicine with care, and to report any problems experienced while on any medication.

Subsequent programmes dealt with heart attacks, first aid, drug adherence, tuberculosis and contraception.

3. Discussion

Getting the radio talk show off the ground was a challenge to ULAPS because it was new ground. It turned out to be a very worthwhile and fulfilling activity for the various participants. Before every show the participants researched the topic to be covered by consulting health professionals, lecturers, medical books and also by keeping abreast of information from new studies and reports. The shows were possible because many pharmacy students volunteered and offered to present on various topics. The response received from the community through calls was positive and encouraging in that they saw our project as very meaningful and contributory to a better life for all. The staff members of the Pharmacy Programme have also contributed to the early success of the talk shows by encouraging the students to go beyond their classrooms and reach out to various communities.

The time allocated for the show is problematic because it clashes with well-established popular television programmes like Generations (at 20h00, SABC1) and Sepedi news (at 20h30 on SABC 2), and also some of the target audience are in the library at that time. Any other time slot will have its own disadvantages. ULAPS hopes that as the show becomes a regular on the station, it will develop a faithful following among the listeners on its merits.

After covering the above topics, the ULAPS radio show took a break because of the end of semester examinations and will resume in the next academic year (2006). The plan is to involve staff members from the pharmacy programme and other available health professionals, and students doing other health related courses in the discussions. This will boost the standard of the discussions by having experts talk about their areas of expertise. The other suggestion, based on audience reactions, is to allow the audience to call in with questions and comments during the show. Whereas this may prolong the show the interactive nature may make it even more beneficial to the target population.

4. Conclusion

One philosopher said “It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness”.

In the face of the mounting high burden of disease among many of our people in South Africa, ULAPS was faced with a choice between lamenting how bad the situation was and doing something about it. We chose the latter by doing the little we could, which is to provide information and hope that (some of) the listeners hear what we have to say and make a change or act accordingly. If the words of the ULAPS show bring comfort to one or two people suffering from a chronic condition, or if they discourage those who would otherwise make bad lifestyle choices, then our objectives will have been met.

Acknowledgements:

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Finally, to the listeners of Radio Turf FM, thank you for the warm welcome.