

ABSTRACT
PARALLEL WORKING SESSION

HEALTH

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Barriers to involving adolescents in health care and decisions about treatment: Impact of a communications skills work shop with Zambian health professionals

Objective: To identify perceived barriers to self-management in adolescents with chronic health conditions and to explore the impact of a communications skills workshop on Zambian health professionals' attitudes to involving young people in health care.

Method: Participants were 39 health professionals including 13 nurses, 6 medical officers, 6 clinical medical students, 4 doctors and 4 physiotherapists attending a communications workshop. Prior to the workshop, participants were asked to complete a 14 item questionnaire assessing attitudes to involving young people aged 10 to 19 years in their healthcare. Participants rated their level of agreement to each statement on a 5 point Likert scale. The second part of the questionnaire asked open ended questions probing their perceptions of costs and barriers associated with involving adolescents in decision about their health. At the end of the workshop participants completed the attitude questionnaire again.

Results: There have been various communication skills training for health practitioners carried out as a part of the DeLPHE project. The staffs involved in the project were exposed to communication skills training by the UK partners and this was introduced as a part of the curriculum at the School of Medicine at the University of Zambia. The feedback obtained from students reinforced the benefit of such training. This workshop therefore built upon the earlier training by focusing on young people with chronic illness, as the services available for this group in Zambia are minimal. It was found that the attitude of health professionals significantly improved after the workshop. (mean 58.67; $t=2.8$, $df=30$, $p=0.009$). Analysis of qualitative data from the participants of the workshop showed that participants identified a number of costs and barriers associated with shared decision making including the nature of the decisions made.

Conclusion: Health professionals working with young people in a developing country were positive about involving young people in their health care but qualitative data revealed many structural and cognitive barriers. A communications skills workshop improved attitudes and may facilitate implementation of shared decision making. Therefore we recommend that such training be integrated into the health system in Zambia.