INNOVATIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROJECT

Partnerships in health care: Delivering a just-in-time professional development intervention as an effective crisis response

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Abstract

Partnership between a government health department, a tertiary education provider and healthcare professionals is effective in providing professional development in response to a crisis in the form of just-in-time education. In 2020 and 2021, this type of partnership supported nurses and nurse educators in clinical settings when resources were stretched. The partnership fostered the provision of evidence-based practice. As a result of this partnership, nurse participants of a massive open online course demonstrated improved knowledge and confidence when caring for patients presenting with COVID-19.

Keywords: partnership; professional development; massive open online course; nurse; crisis response

Introduction

Effective healthcare crisis management requires an immediate, coordinated response and rapid information transfer to upskill and prepare health professionals to deliver safe patient care (El Ali et al., 2023). "Just-in-time" education for nurses, delivered through a massive open online course (MOOC), was demonstrated to be an effective crisis management intervention (El Ali et al., 2023). A partnership established between multiple stakeholders, including an Australian university, the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), practising nurses, eLearning designers and the OpenLearning platform, led to the successful implementation of an intervention during the pandemic crisis in Australia (El Ali et al., 2023). The impact of the program was evaluated as part of a larger study where participants undertook a pre-test and post-test survey. The results demonstrated statistically significant improvements in knowledge related to caring in the COVID-19 environment (Leathwick et al., 2023). Statistics revealed improved scores from the survey pre-test (M = 19.23, SD = 2.17) to the post-test (M = 21.29, SD = 2.25), t (283) = 13.11, p < 0.001 (two-tailed). The magnitude of differences in means (M = 2.06, 95% CI:1.75–2.37) (eta squared = 0.38) indicates a large effect size (Leathwick et al., 2023).

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Innovation

The COVID4NURSES program was an innovative education intervention that met the needs of the healthcare workforce that was in crisis. COVID4NURSES resulted from the partnership between key stakeholders with the aim of upskilling sub-acute nurses' knowledge and skills within the existing workforce. This intervention was implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to deliver safe patient care just-in-time. A MOOC was adopted as the most pertinent method to deliver the intervention to reach the disparate cohort of nurses working across Victoria. The intervention was subsequently made available to a broader cohort of nurses, midwives and student nurses. The partnership between all key stakeholders was essential in establishing the recommended content, learning design, target participants and delivery methods for disseminating the information. The terms collaboration and partnerships are often used interchangeably, however a clear distinction in definition exists between the two. A partnership infers "a formal, structured relationship between equals with mutually defined objectives and goals" whereas a collaboration refers to an informal mutual working arrangement (Glazer et al., 2008, p. 1). A 6-week time frame from proposal to implementation was imposed to ensure the intervention was available just-in-time.

Filtering the vast amount of evolving information for credibility and relevance in a state specific healthcare context presented a significant challenge (El Ali et al., 2023). Consequently, the academics responsible for the MOOC were continuously updating content during the intervention to ensure accurate information, supporting evidence-based practice. Live updates and availability of a program facilitator supported a more engaging learning environment, subsequently contributing to higher completion rates.

The partnership ensured the intervention was audience and information targeted. The DHHS provided policy and practice updates, further strengthening the partnership (El Ali et al., 2023). Practising nurse managers and nurses assisted with ensuring module ease of completion and meeting the needs of sub-acute nurses. Table 1 outlines module topics and content implemented in the program.

Table 1

Module Topics and Content

Module 1 – What is COVID-19?
Module 2 – Infection control in the COVID-19 environment
Module 3 – Respiratory assessment in the COVID-19 environment
Module 4 – Respiratory management in the COVID-19 environment
Module 5 – End-of-life care for patients with COVID-19

Evaluation

The university reported weekly program analytics to the DHHS throughout the life of the program. The partnership resulted in two 6-month offerings of the MOOC, in 2020 and 2021, to over 2,000 nurses, midwives and student nurses. The partnership was essential to support the successful delivery of the intervention through the provision of vital information, live program updates and participant feedback.

While the focus was on delivering a high-quality intervention, it was also important that participants completed the program. The learning required to understand OpenLearning platform functionality hindered initial program completion for some participants. MOOCs have notoriously low completion rates (Leathwick et al., 2023). The COVID4NURSES intervention completion rate averaged over 30%, a high completion result for a MOOC (El Ali et al., 2023).

Lessons learned

Commitment to the partnership supported evidence-based nursing care during a challenging period for healthcare. Evaluation of the program results (Leathwick et al., 2023) revealed the intervention improved nurses' knowledge during the emergent and ongoing phases of the pandemic. Strong leadership, teamwork and the expertise of key stakeholders resulted in successful implementation of the initiative.

Participants from a broad range of specialty environments, such as emergency and correctional health, demonstrated the flexibility of MOOCs to reach large audiences. Partnership with the eLearning designers supported improvements to program delivery. Minor modifications to the required program activities supported higher rates of completion for participants. When health services are stretched for human and educational resources, partnerships with education providers are essential to spread workload and expertise for health education.

What next?

The partnership demonstrated that successful delivery of a just-in-time education initiative can be facilitated through academic and governmental partnerships during a crisis. The initiative demonstrated that a just-in-time strategy can be successfully adopted to deliver emergent and ongoing education across multiple settings to rapidly disseminate information.

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Conflicts of interest and funding

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