

Student Involvement and Mobilization in Health Promotion

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Introduction

Health promotion is the science and art of helping people to change their lifestyle to achieve optimal health. (1) It requires strong actions, broad participation and sustained advocacy. Students represent dynamic and active yet vulnerable and risky youth population of the society. They can be involved and mobilized not only as target population rather as enthusiastic partners in health promotion activities who have greater outreach and impact in the society. This paper shares various experiences of PHM-NSC on health promotion activities through rapid mobilization and full participation of students.

Literatures for the article were collected and compiled after the review of available published documents, reports, research papers, books, journals, articles etc. Internet searches for the electronic resources were carried out by using MEDLINE, HINARI, and Google. The mesh term used for searching the articles and paper were health, promotion, youth, youth involvement and Nepal.

Background

Health is the state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing not merely an absence of disease or infirmity (WHO 1948). Though most popular, this absolute definition of health poses a very ideal situation to

define somebody healthy. Health is not an individual entity and is affected by broad dimensions of social, cultural, political and economic environment.(2) United Nations addresses attainment of optimum level of health as the fundamental rights of every human being without discrimination(3) (Universal declaration of Human Rights 1948). It undertakes the very principal of human right to offer positive and inclusive concept of health.(4)

As endorsed by Ottawa Charter, "Health promotion as the first level of prevention is the process of enabling people to improve their general health and well being and hence enables people to increase control over and improve their health." Health promotion aims for creating supportive environment, building healthy public policy, strengthening community action, reorienting health services, developing skills at individual level and calling for commitment to health promotion.(1) It intends to create favorable condition for attainment of prerequisite of health through advocacy by enabling all people to achieve their fullest health potential and mediating between different interests in the society for the pursuit of health. So a greater focus is given for building community networks, strong engagement of media for mass advocacy incorporating clinical professionals and other related stakeholders to pursue action to transform health care systems to achieve their potential in health promotion and disease prevention. Health promotion requires sustainable, resilient and persistent

action at local regional, national and international perspectives.(4, 5)

Youth (15-24) years occupy about 20% of the total population of Nepal. (6) This majorly represents school and college going population. This group of population holds the significant scope in the arena of promotive and preventive health. Health promotion calls and demands for various actors of society who can directly and indirectly create an impact on the enhancement of healthy and quality lifestyle. The holistic approach of health promotion not only demands for interventions to improve health of these young people rather it claims for active partnership and involvement to achieve sustainable health behaviors.(7, 8) The dynamic young population during the state of physical, social and mental transition is exposed to various risk factors prone to their health. Involving young people today will generate streams of health benefits in near future as they are the future leaders, policy makers, health professionals and responsible citizens of the nation.(7) Involvement of young people in health promotion acts as a bridging channel and strong advocacy media between youth and concerned legal authority to build healthy public policy. Young people being close to the family as well as community level are taken as very effective source for sensitization of health issue, consensus development, information dissemination, behavior change communication and reinforcing healthy practices to obtain highest possible level of health.(9) Mobilization of young people/students in health promotion mediates and enables to achieve the ultimate health potential at individual as well as community and national level. Students as a group of learners always desires to learn new things amplify and mediate them. Ottawa Charter identifies school as a very important setting in health promotion. More children than ever before are attending school and for longer period in their lives. Child to child approach endorsed by Ottawa charter act as effective measure for health promotion and students at school settings are the best media for this.(1)

Peoples Health Movement Nepal Students Circle is a coalition of dynamic and energetic young minds sensitized by historic people's health movement to raise their voice for equitable and quality health for now and forwarding solutions to address it at regional, national and international level.(10) It affirms and endorses the People's Charter for Health and adds students' perspective that strengthens and advances its potential to stimulate action. Building on the momentum of the global People's Health Movement, the circle is com-

mitted to the grassroots mobilization of all students in demanding the transformation of our educational institutions and social systems, based on the its guiding principles.

PHM calls for active participation of all stakeholders including youth to ensure equitable and affordable access to health resources and guarantee health as fundamental human right which is in inline with the principles and strategies of Ottawa charter for health promotion.

Strategies for youth involvement and mobilization in Health Promotion

Based on the thematic issues of PHM-NSC a wide range of strategies have been applied for involving and mobilizing youth to develop skills and attitude towards adapting and sustaining healthy behaviors and advocating different issues of health promotion. Major health promoting activities being carried out through PHM-NSC are discussed below.

PHM Public Lectures

People's Health Nepal Students' Circle has envisaged conducting regular public lectures in pertinent issues of public health like issues in reproductive rights, political commitment on revitalization of primary health care, social and economical determinants on health, people's health rights. PHM lectures are targeted to students, professionals and others who have interest to pursue understanding in global public health problems, issues of health promotion and agendas for people's health. The lectures aims for contributing in reorienting the health systems, increasing public awareness, sensitizing and advocating for sustaining as well as adopting healthy behaviors. With a theme "We listen, we interact, we learn, we develop the attitude" the lectures are the spaces for the realization of multidimensional nature of health.

PHM Discussion Forum

PHM Nepal Students Circle conducts regular discussion forum in different public health issues with a motto of "Opinion matters. When thoughts conflict, better ideas are generated." Various agendas of health promotion like health policy, health system in the nation, health related treaties and conferences, challenge of globalization in health and behavior related issues are critically analyzed and discussed. PHM discussion forum are conducted in regular basis among the students, professionals and distinct faculties. Forums are participatory, interactive and solution orientated.

PHM Theater

PHM Theater is a unique of its kind and has been devised to disseminate information related to global and national health issues blended with entertainment. Inspirational, interesting films, documentaries and dramas with abundant health promotion messages are shown followed by small discussion and sharing of ideas.

PHM Alliances and networks

Health promotion asks for multisectoral and integrative efforts sustainable health promoting activities. Likewise PHM Nepal Student Circle With the vision to encompass all the interested individuals in people's health movement activism, Circle has been doing alliance and networking with students and professionals from different fields. This alliance and networking is having a significant effect on the integration of the health promotion in the different dimensions of public health from the right based approach. It aims for the establishing health promotion as a cross-cutting issue of the social development.

PHM Advocacy and Activism school

PHM Nepal Students Circle organizes regular advocacy and activism schools to sharpen students' capacity to critically appraise and advocate for various health agenda conducive to health and health promotion. In this theme new cadres are built up to develop and adapt skills to carry out health promotion actions at actual field situation. The student's try to critically review the different school of thoughts related to the different dimensions of health and how this factors influences the health of the individual together the whole national health systems. Analysis of the global policy influences the local health issues and the macro-economic forces "pressurize" the local agencies to alter their public policies.

PHM at community level

School health program and celebration of health events through awareness programs are major health promotion activities carried out by PHM-NSC at community level in full participation and co-ordination of respective stakeholders.

Rapid mobilization of IT and social media

In order to reach out wider range of young minds and as tool of mass advocacy PHM-NSC utilizes and mobilizes IT and social media. It also creates a platform to disseminate our local activities to a global forum and vice-versa through Publication of newsletter, develop-

ing websites and discussion groups.

Discussion

These small initiatives of PHM-NSC provide various learning supplemental in health promoting activities. Engagement of young people in health promotion is sustainable and cost effective method of health promotion. It is successful in bridging the gap between source of knowledge/skills and point of practical application i.e. family and community. At an individual level students acquired skills and develop attitude towards positive health practices. Young people are strong advocacy media to address the baseline reality to concerned legal authority in building healthy public policy favoring the health promotion. Use of new media and technology made easy access to the global information and circulating our local health promotional activities to global forum and reaching out the youth arena. Being the youth ourselves and our experience on working among other dynamic and energetic young minds on various health promotion issues through PHM-NSC has shown youth can be responsible partners in health promotion. Engagement of Young people in health promotion is challenging yet sustainable and cost effective method of health promotion. Health promotion activities helped to develop personal skills and attitude towards positive health practices among the youth. PHM-NSC being a global forum, activities of these young people got an international platform to sensitize the concerned authority for generating political commitment in health promotion.

Conclusion

Health promotion is a continuous task and requires deliberate efforts of all stakeholders.(11) Thus integration of students as major partner in health promotion activities is very necessary for effectiveness and sustainability of the program. Creation of favorable environment by developing youth groups and networks in school/academic and other different social settings (7). It plans implement and evaluate health promotional activities. It also demands for integration and development of health promotion curriculum from very basic school level. Right information from right place through right person and media is very effective for proper dissemination of the information. So establishment of information centers highly equipped and resourced with information technology and active young people participation is an exclusive need of the time. Intensifying

advocacy and constant lobbying with concerned sectors is necessary to adapt holistic approach of health promotion in health service delivery of the nation.

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