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Health Education Strategy in a Large Project

Traditionally, health education has been an activity where a health worker stand in front of a captive audience, most commonly out-patients waiting in a hospital or a clinic, to talk to them about a health issue. I sincerely started health education in this mode early in my medical carrier and kept on doing it, in the absence of any better ideas. However, it turned out to be frustrating because few paid any attention to it. People politely listened to me because I was the big doctor telling them what to do to have better health. I am sure those minds had other things to worry about. The small business that was suffering because of the child's illness as there was no one to attend to it. A laborer must have been thinking if he is going to get a job for the day because he missed out being picked up by contractors in the morning due to his need to come to the hospital. Others might be worrying about the sick child who needed to be seen as soon as possible. Whilst this activity has some merit, other ways of increasing knowledge and awareness about health are required to impress upon people how each one of us can help ourselves in reducing the burden of disease and illness.

My thinking on health promotion and education has evolved as my career progressed in public health and believe that health education should be intimately integrated with curative activities for better results. This article is an account of a collective approach to health education in a large Public Health Department in Indonesian setting.

A big challenge was facing me in 2002 when I was contracted by International SOS to lead the public health programme in Freeport Gold and Copper mining in Papua, Indonesia. The project employed over 17,000 mine workers and the families of resident workers required primary health care provision. Freeport had taken the responsibility of providing primary health care to the resettled population but it had continued to grow and now almost whole of Timika relied on services provided through several health centers managed under the Freeport Public Health Programme.

The public health programme had staff of over 300, main bulk of workers engaged in entomological aspects of malaria control programme, but adequate staff to provide health services through the Freeport health centers. The noticeable absence of preventive activities, apart from the malaria programme, was apparent. The work largely consisted of illness care through health centers and among the sex workers. No active health education and awareness programme existed for the workforce and the public.

During our weekly staff meeting discussions were held on the need for health education. There was an urgent need to add health education and awareness alongside the illness care activities. Many suggestions came up and in a short time a number of activities started to turn the department into a real public health programme. Idea was to start with the most pressing health problems with a programme which will have maximum impact.

Billboards for Awareness

Sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, had become a major health issue. With more than 17,000 workers and other business communities living in the township, there was a big entertainment industry of karaoke and drinking bars, employing large number of bar maids as service women. We decided to use health promotion division in the department to take lead and develop in house poster designing and production. Surprisingly ample of talent emerged. Draft poster would be presented, suggestions for improvements received and final draft approved in the next meeting. These posters were then printed to A1 size in the company printing press and required numbers printed in

town. The road from Timika airport, exclusively used by Freeport chartered planes for its staff, was around 75 Kms. Company buses plied on this road taking thousands of workers up and down the hill daily. The traffic was at its peak over the weekends when workers would come down for rest and recreation. Public health department erected huge bill boards along the road all the way to the hill top mining site. Posters were also mounted at suitable places, starting from the airport lounge to health centers and company' two hospitals, public buildings, transport buses used by the workers, dining halls and canteens, cable cars carrying workers from base to the mine and any other place which was considered suitable for workers to notice. First time in the history of Freeport that such a campaign was implemented. Health education during regular medical examination and health checks further complemented advice on STIs and HIV/AIDS.

Company Website for Health Education

All communications within the company were through its website. Public health department decided to post a weekly article on a health topic every Monday and any other relevant news. Home page was clearly marked by Public Health icon. It was a highly disciplined activity as we had to send a final piece to the IT department before the weekend for it to be published on Monday. It was never missed. The website produced account of hits to the site and provided readers opportunity to ask questions, which were replied by the public health team. A typical Topic for a week looked like this [hiv_hasnt_gone_away.pdf](#)

Continued Medical Education

Weekly staff meetings consisted of a presentation by a member of the staff on any current health related subject. This opportunity was used to disseminate health updates and new information for health workers to keep abreast with the fast moving health information. This prepared the health center in charge and other health workers for proactive health education during their daily work routine. Maternal and Child health, HIV/AIDS and TB programmes used health education as an important component in the delivery of primary health care.

Bilingual Quarterly Bulletin

Public Health and Malaria Control also published a bilingual quarterly bulletin to disseminate health messages as widely as possible. Brochures and Stickers with health messages were also produced for public awareness and education. (two samples [bulletin 2-04.pdf](#) [bulletin 4-04.pdf](#))

Health Promotion Database

There was so much of health education material being produced in the department with all these activities that we decided to build a computerised access database of available material, so that it can be shared by internal and external users. Our two IT officers did a wonderful job in setting it up. Three screen prints in the gallery below demonstrate the functionality of the database.

Sexually Transmitted Infections Programme in Bars

With huge number of mine workers, and most of them far away from home, the karaoke bars and sex industry had flourishing business. This industry has developed over time, and is located some distance away from the town and company activities. The mine workers would head straight to these bars on Fridays. At a point in time, there were over 500 sex workers in these bars. Public health department had no choice but to try to look after these workers and provide them with information to protect themselves from STIs by insisting on using a condom with every client. In addition a medical clinic was held twice a week in the locality where each worker was offered medical examination along with testing for any STIs and HIV, followed by treatment. Counselling and health education was actively provided to each sex worker along with medical assistance (smear testing and periodic blood test for HIV). Aim was to promote protection through 100% condom use. Attendance to these medical

examinations was complete and the HIV+ status was maintained at a low level.

World AIDS Day

Every year on 1st December, a public awareness programme was organised by public health department. The main activity was a grand parade of public going through the towns and bazaars displaying health education messages for HIV/AIDS awareness and a message of self-protection. This was followed by public meetings, depending on the location, in play grounds or big halls. Many fun activities were organised. Short films were shown, questions and answers sessions were conducted with rewards for correct answers. Sports, music, sing-song sessions and dances brought together big crowds. A report of the World AIDS Day shows the type of activities undertaken. See a report here [World AIDS Day](#)

At the end of one year the Freeport public health department was a comprehensive health awareness and illness care unit. Have a look at the gallery below for some of the activities in the project.

These activities have proved to be effective and have been implemented into other projects since then.