

COMMUNICATION – THE KEY FACTOR IN PREVENTING NOSOCOMIAL RESISTANT INFECTIONS

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The hospital infection committee has the main responsibility to try and control nosocomial infections and antimicrobial resistance in the hospital. For curbing hospital-acquired infections, the committee needs effective communication with all the key players responsible.

KEY-STAKEHOLDERS

Coalitions and networking are important in uniting stakeholders with shared interests, combining their knowledge and resources for advocating increased awareness and effective response to nosocomial infections and antimicrobial resistance.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- i. Public health practitioners
- ii. Healthcare providers
- iii. Infection Control Professionals
- iv. Microbiology Laboratory Directors
- v. Professional and voluntary organizations
- vi. Policymakers (from executive and legislative wings of the government)
- vii. Media
- viii. The public
- ix. Educators

By conducting an assessment of health bulletins, newsletters, electronic communication updates, minutes of association meetings etc., the hospital infection committee can identify opportunities to collaborate with existing stakeholder networks that share a common interest on the problems of nosocomial infections and antimicrobial resistance.

CATEGORIES OF MISUNDERSTANDING AMONG THE STAKEHOLDERS

Awareness of common reasons for misunderstanding may help the hospital infection committee to nip the problem in the bud.

- End user information unknown to the provider
- Provider information unknown to end user
- Conflicting information given (verbal/non-verbal mismatch; doctor to doctor variations)
- Disagreement about nature of the problem or its causation (knowledge gap)
- Failure of communication about doctor's decision
- Dysfunctional relationship among various stakeholders

TEN ATTRIBUTES OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

The following are ten attributes of generic nature which are important factors in effective communication. The hospital infection committee should ensure that these attributes are embedded in all the communication strategies adopted to combat nosocomial infections and antimicrobial resistance.

These attribute are:

- i. Accuracy: Valid content presented accurately.
- ii. Availability: The message is available to the end user at the time of its need.

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- iii. Timeliness: The message is conveyed when the end user is in need of and most receptive to it.
- iv. Understandable: Follows the norms of clarity, choice of words appropriate for the end user.
- v. Culturally competent: The message, the medium and the mode of delivery are appropriate for the culture of the end user.
- vi. Reliability: The end users can rely on the source, and the message.
- vii. Evidence based: The message as well as the communication method is evidence based.
- viii. Balance: Presentation is balanced, e.g., felt need vs. real need, benefit and risk, cost and benefit, natural history and outlook etc.
- ix. Consistency: The message is internally consistent over time and externally consistent with other sources of unbiased information.
- x. Repetition: Repeated delivery to reinforce the message.

Meticulous planning by the hospital infection committee is essential to ensure that the message presented is effective and accurately conveys the facts. For instance, if surveillance programmes on nosocomial infections and antimicrobial resistance have to be effective and useful, the communications plan should raise awareness and increase key-stakeholder participation in the surveillance. Later, effective communication is critical for disseminating results, maintaining interest in the process, and for disseminating prevention messages to the providers and the public.

EFFECTIVE MODES OF COMMUNICATION

For decades, health professionals have relied upon peer-reviewed journals, newsletters and surveillance reports as the modes of choice for timely dissemination of news and updates. With the telecommunication capabilities today, a coalition network can access a variety of timely, effective and inexpensive modes of effective electronic telecommunication.

Various electronic means that remain relatively cost effective and have a broad reach include: batch e-mail/fax, audio conference, and video conference. Targeted list serves can reach potentially large audiences. List serves have a flexible design and may be used as an alternate form of electronic updating (i.e., scheduled emails) or as a more interactive social media network (Linked-In, Face Book etc) resource that provides all the users access to message boards and chat rooms.

Traditional public relations tools such as press releases, news conferences, press fact sheets, and media-briefings are primary resources that deliver a message to the public and local community. Local-level communication infrastructures should incorporate community TV network to disseminate messages of antibiotic resistance or vaccine efficacy to cost-effectively reach the general public. Learning to utilize these channels of communication is a very effective way to reduce direct personnel effort while the message is delivered to a wide audience.

For areas with rich ethnic or racial diversity, it is important build partnerships with community organizations and with credible media, which are familiar with cultural preferences of the community for accessing and receiving information. Otherwise the campaign may fail badly. We must carefully tailor information so that the content is presented at the appropriate literacy level, packaged in an attractive manner and disseminated through accepted channels of communication.

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES

When developing a clear and effective communication plan, consider the following steps:

Step 1: Plan and Select Communications Strategy

- What is the message and image you want to create?
- Who are key audiences you want to target?
- What are the challenges to accurately conveying this message to your target audiences?
- How will you seek funding to continue this activity?

Step 2: Select Communication Channels and Materials

- Are there established communication channels to target audiences that are open to partnership opportunities?
- Where is there a need to develop communications channels to reach target audiences?
- What are the most effective tools of communicating with target audience members? (i.e., brochures, PSAs, posters, face-to face consultation, hotline)

Step 3: Develop Materials and Pre-Test for Acceptance

- How do focus groups comprised of target audience members evaluate the materials?
- Are focus groups representative of the target audience?
- Are the materials understood, convey the appropriate message, considered useful by the target audiences?

Step 4: Implement Communication Plan

- Which staff member will manage the communication plan?
- Should coalition members consider pilot testing prior to full rollout of message?

Step 5: Evaluate Communication Plan and Use Feedback for Program Improvements

- What types of survey instruments should be developed to test effectiveness?
- How will these tools be evaluated?
- Who will oversee the evaluation process?
- Is there a need to contract outside evaluation assistance?
- How is the communication received and understood by target audience?
- Are there opportunities to refine the message and improve effectiveness?

SUMMARY

Developing effective communications strategies is crucial to help form a coalition among stakeholders and to promote effective response to combat nosocomial infections and antimicrobial resistance.

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