

Addressing the Healthcare Worker Shortage in Rural Uganda by Training Village Health Workers

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Categories: Environmental Health

Keywords:

How to cite this poster

Cluka B (2012) Addressing the Healthcare Worker Shortage in Rural Uganda by Training Village Health Workers. Cureus 4(10): e329.

Abstract

Purpose of Study: Uganda is currently suffering from a severe deficit in healthcare workers, with only 81 medical personnel for every 100,000 people. The rural areas are disproportionately impacted by this shortage. In an effort to address this shortage, Uganda has recently turned its attention toward task shifting, which is the transfer of certain responsibilities from a doctor or nurse to healthcare worker with less training. A cornerstone of this concept is the training of Village Health Workers (VHW's). This project took place in Kiboga, a rural district in central Uganda with a population of 300,000 and a mere five physicians responsible for direct patient care. A VHW training program was conducted in collaboration with the NGO Global Youth Partnership for Africa (GYPA). **Methods Used:** A group of 19 volunteers attended courses four hours per week for a total of six weeks. Lectures were based on David Werner's *Where There is No Doctor* and students were supplied with a copy of this book and a first aid kit. The author interviewed district officials to ascertain what skills the village health workers needed, and created and taught classroom sessions in collaboration with a GYPA volunteer physician. A pocket guide was designed and distributed to the students and additional copies were provided to previous village health worker graduates and to the program coordinator for use in future courses. **Summary of Results:** 18 of the 19 volunteers successfully completed the six-week training course. The students were enthusiastic about the training, as they felt it would prepare them to take an active role in influencing the health of their community. Residents throughout Kiboga who were interviewed stated that the implementation of village health teams has contributed to improved health outcomes and will continue to have a positive impact on the community. GYPA will continue to organize the course and train volunteers. **Conclusions:** Training VHW's can help combat the healthcare worker shortage and leads to improved health literacy throughout the community. Further analysis is needed in order to ascertain whether training and utilizing VHW's results in measurable improvements in health outcomes. Additional work is necessary in order to increase collaboration between the district and the NGO's teaching the courses.

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Published 10/09/2012

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