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Health Promotion Strategies

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Health promotion is important in the reduction of disease risk in individuals throughout the UK. Currently, the population is becoming increasingly at risk of suffering from diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and osteoarthritis through participating in risky health behaviors such as smoking, sedentary lifestyles and obesity. Health promotion in the health care services is therefore one of the key methods through which individuals can employ persuasive methodologies alongside personal one-to-one counseling for individuals which health to alter the behaviors, knowledge and attitudes of individuals towards the health choices they make. It is thought that, through the use of such health promotion strategies, this can help determine the individual's healthcare outcomes.

There are several different health promotion techniques and models, which can be applied, in clinical practice. One such model is Beattie's health promotion model (1991), which identifies four paradigms: Health persuasion, personal counseling, and community development and legislative action. Beattie (1991) is of the opinion, that when action plans are put into practice within the community, if each of these four paradigms are met, through effective partnership working then all plans will lead to the development of improved patient behaviors and outcomes. Through applying health persuasion methods, it can be seen that providing them with evidence about how their behaviors will influence their health outcomes can alter individual attitudes. For example, providing statistical information to smokers about the likelihood of their behavior choices on their future development of diseases such as COPD, emphysema, lung cancer and other related conditions, could all act to alter the beliefs they have about the consequences of their actions. Thus, persuading the patients that quitting smoking would be beneficial to their health in the long term could be successful in reducing their risk of suffering from disease in the future and promote a healthier living style for that individual. It is important that the healthcare advice provided to the individual who wishes to cease smoking is both focused and individualized, as this will be much more persuasive evidence which will prove as a 'need' to quit for the individual over information which is more generalized. For example, it is much more persuasive to provide evidence of the benefits of quitting to a mother of two children, telling her that she will feel fitter and more able to play with her children if she is to quit smoking, than the same information would be to a woman without children.

Community development, on the other hand, focuses more upon developing strategies to promote healthy living by targeting individuals in their community setting rather than on a one-to-one basis in a clinical setting. Such examples include placing posters and adverts about the effects of smoking and the benefits of quitting in public places such as libraries, public toilets and such like. The literature recommends that intensive smoking cessation support should where possible be conducted in groups, include coping skills training and social support, and should offer around five sessions of about one hour over about one month, and follow up (Raw et al, 1998) the literature also promotes the use of nicotine replacement therapy for individuals who wish to quit smoking as this is thought to encourage individuals to give up through helping to remove some of the desire to smoke through the addiction to nicotine which they will have. The emphasis of community participation in healthcare promotion and education strategies for smoking cessation is clearly beneficial in helping individuals to quit smoking and promote a healthier living style as they can provide support for each other and they would be encouraged to share success stories and methods which they have tried and had success with, amongst one another. In addition, promotion of healthier living strategies within the community would be beneficial to individuals, as this would raise awareness to the existence of such programs and the effects of lifestyle choices on the overall health of the individual.

In order to achieve success in any of the aforementioned dimensions of healthcare promotion however, it is important to create and implement an action plan. The action plan should include a focused approach to providing education to the individuals about the importance of altering their behavior. (Health Development Agency, 2004) Focusing this approach on the use of partnerships within the community and helping individuals who smoke to work together in groups to quit and improve their health will help them to become increasingly proactive. Strategies of health promotion must ensure that they provide information to the patients about how they will be able to quit as well as why it is important for them to from a health perspective. (Hrebiniak and Joyce, 1984).

Quitting smoking will improve an individual's lifestyle, despite the fact that it is a difficult task, it is worthwhile for health, legal and social reasons. Due to the fact that smoking cigarettes is addictive, there will be many reasons why it will be difficult for individuals to give up smoking such as associations which they may have made between certain social situations and smoking or simply, habits such as smoking whilst waiting for a bus or when waking up in the morning. Health promotion and education should therefore ensure that they inform individuals about the difficulties such as these which they will be likely to encounter and they should provide the individuals with ways and means of getting past these psychologically hard situations, without giving in their efforts to quit. Health education programs should encourage individuals to take part in some other activity which would take the emphasis away from their smoking, perhaps participate in exercise which will not only help to reduce their desire to smoke through providing entertainment, but which will also act to improve their health and also their social interaction.

It is important to have methods of assessing the affectivity of health promotion and education strategies. It is noted, that community based cessation interventions are harder to assess and to evaluate for their affectivity. Community based methods however are thought to be very cost effective methods of improving health on a larger scale. An example of a community based approach to smoking cessation can be seen in 'No Smoking Day' which is a UK wide campaign aiming to raise awareness to the effects of smoking on health and to help promote smoking cessation and efforts which individuals are making to quit smoking.

Community based interventions also include healthcare professionals such as dentists and pharmacists as these professionals come into contact with individuals regularly, offering an opportunity to promote healthier living. (Health Education Authority, 1996)

The literature (Cromwell et al, 1997) highlights that although it is the case that the provision of brief advice from a GP can be effective (Flore et al, 2006), it only proves to be effective in approximately 2% of smokers. Thus, other intervention methods are clearly important to help in the reduction of smoking in society.

Persuasive action, as mentioned by Beatties health promotion model (1991) can be effective, particularly when health professionals make the most of each opportunity which they have to ask smokers about their smoking and their feelings about it and its effect on their health. Advising smokers of their health need to stop and the provision of assistance for stopping alongside arranging follow up meetings which can help them to ensure that they maintain their smoking cessation would increase the strength of the persuasive action of smoking cessation which would be provided to the individual. Finally, placing smokers in contact with individuals who have been successful at quitting and who have noted big benefits from quitting would be very influential and persuasive for individuals when trying to help them to quit smoking.

Thus, in conclusion, health promotion activities can be greatly influential in aiding individuals to comply with healthier living behaviors. Through the use of health promotion models, such as Beatties (1991), community based interventions and persuasive techniques can be found to be greatly effective if used in the right setting and if applied at the correct time and by an effective and influential professional.

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