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EFFECT OF ON-LINE SEXUALITY EDUCATION ON HEALTH PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS' COMFORT IN PROVISION OF SEXUAL HEALTH CARE

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Introduction:

The unit of study "Sexuality for Health Professionals" is offered on-line unit as an elective to all students enrolled in the Health Sciences Faculty of the University of Sydney. The unit utilises the PLISSIT management model to present an interactive learning unit on the Web CT learning platform. This paper presents the analysis of a pre and post learning evaluation of the unit.

Methods

An on-line questionnaire was linked to the Web CT learning site. Students were requested to complete the questionnaire in the first week of the unit (pre-test) and the final week (post-test). The questionnaire consisted of 10 scenarios of client sexual health concerns. Students rated their comfort in dealing with these scenarios.

Results:

There were 106 students enrolled in the unit. Of these 102 responded to the pretest (96%) and 62 to the post-test (58.5%). Students reported a significant improvement ($F = 5.733$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.018$) in their comfort levels when 'dealing with client questions related to sexuality'. Comfort in dealing with specific scenarios varied. The largest improvements in comfort were in 'asking a client about sexual practice' ($F = 9.646$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.002$), 'talking to a 70 year old widow on sexual practice' ($F = 9.566$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.002$) and 'discussing sexual options with a handicapped client' ($F = 7.899$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.006$). There was no improvement in the item 'comfort with physical examination'.

Conclusions:

These results suggest that on-line learning in sexuality education is an effective method of improving health professional student's comfort in dealing with sexual health issues. It also demonstrates the need to recognise the weakness of on-line learning in skill development. Future research will explore the effect of individual student characteristics and professional roles in this area.