

A Health Promoting Experience with the Blind



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Pre & post health screening



Group discussion



Health talk on Healthy eating

INTRODUCTION:

The visually impaired is a marginalized minority in Malaysia. Set up since 1927, the St Nicholas Home in Penang, Malaysia provides educational and vocational training to the blind to allow them to be eventually integrated into the society. Today the Home has 102 blind "trainees" enrolled in their 6-month training program. It is found that many of these trainees are unhealthy; for example, about 24% of them are diabetic, and many are overweight/obese. However, the nutritional needs of the trainees are neglected, as reflected in the kind of food being served to them at the Home. Sponsors regularly donate unhealthy food items to the Home.

PURPOSE/METHOD

The blind faces many challenges in life, due to their impaired vision. Their nutrition or health does not appear to be a top priority in their training curriculum provided by the Home. The community health department of the Penang Adventist Hospital decided to reach out to this group of individuals. A special 3-day health/nutrition course was designed and conducted for them. Since the trainees take all their meals at the Home, we wanted to ensure the food choices in the cafeteria were healthy. Our intervention therefore focused both on the trainees as well as the canteen operators.

RESULTS

Some 73 trainees (71% of total) attended our health course. Our goal was to teach them how to make good food choices despite their impaired vision. Thus, our dietitians taught the blind about food portion size by feeling with their hands. Our diabetic educators taught them to monitor their blood glucose by using the "Talking Glucometer". Health education classes focusing on healthy eating and diabetes care were given, with many interactive class activities. Our dietitians also taught the canteen operators about ways to make food menu healthier. Finally, we also convinced the Dean of the Home to politely inform any sponsor to donate healthy food items to the residents.

CONCLUSION

As the hospital is embedded in the bigger community, the health needs of the community become a concern for us. Our experience with St Nicholas Home provides a good example of a successful collaboration between a health care provider and a local community organization. It also shows that the health promoting benefit of the hospital should spill over to the community.



We can do it!



St Nicholas Home



Token of appreciation from Training & Social Services Manager of St Nicholas Home



Practical session on using "talking glucometer"



Participants use their hand to feel the correct portion size



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