

THE PREVENTION AND CONTROL INITIATIVES FOR BETTER HEALTH OF THE MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the involvement of the Medical Technology students as volunteers in the service-learning program which pursued the prevention and control of intestinal parasitic infection and dengue fever in the community. They conducted stool examination, de-worming, blood typing, and health education among the community residents. Their journals revealed that they were glad for the opportunity to practice their skills and extend their services without much thought of academic reward. What counted more to them was that the program provided them the avenue to practice, improve their skills, and make them aware of the value of cooperation and service above self. They likewise expressed the need to improve the dissemination of the health services available to them to encourage more residents to participate in the health project of the department.

Introduction

The Department of Medical Technology was identified as one of the units in the university to help address particular health concerns raised by the residents in the partner community of the service learning program of Silliman University. As can be gleaned from the results of the baseline survey and needs assessment conducted by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, health, in particular, parasitism and dengue, came out as one of the priority concerns of the community members. Thus, the Medical Technology Department decided to embark on a program on prevention and control of intestinal parasitic infection and dengue.

The major components of the program design of the Department of Medical Technology included stool examination, de-worming, blood typing, and health education concerning intestinal parasitism, and dengue. Stool examination was carried out basically to identify individuals positive for intestinal parasites.

De-worming in the form of *anti-helminthics* orally administered was also provided. On the other hand, blood typing was performed not only for the residents to know their blood types but most importantly to come up with a list of possible blood donors in the area which will provide the community a guide when looking for potential blood donors. Furthermore, a lecture series was conducted to inform and make the people aware of the dangers, modes of transmission, prevention, and control of parasitism.

Activities

Prior to the conduct and implementation of the program, a series of talks and negotiations had to be made with key people in the partner community. The coordinator of the program visited the elementary school in the community and presented to the teachers and the school principal the proposed health program. Together with five Medical Technology students, the program was also introduced to the parents of the school children during the Parents-Teachers and Community Association (PTCA). Although at this stage the proposal received enthusiastic support, the implementation of the program could not proceed as scheduled due to time constraints and problems of securing approval from the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent of the province.

Instead of implementing the program at the elementary school, the team decided to introduce the program to the partner community through the mothers' association. Unlike in the elementary school, the community and the Barangay Captain granted the approval without difficulty. Moreover, many of them willingly pledged to materialize the proposal.

The Blood Type Activity. Although blood typing activity does not directly pertain to prevention and cure of parasitism and dengue, it basically helps during cases of emergency when one has to undergo blood transfusion or donate blood. In some ways, it will help prevent more health problem complications. Besides, free blood typing proved to be a come-on for the residents to participate in the other activities of the Medical Technology students

relative to the attainment of better health. In the process, they became aware of the importance of knowing one's own blood type and that of the members of their own household.

It was for the reasons cited above that the Department of Medical Technology embarked on this particular activity. It was planned primarily to establish a list of potential blood donors that the community could use as reference. It was a successful service delivery as many residents in the area willingly participated. The lack of blood donor listing was at least addressed by this particular undertaking since a copy of potential donors was already furnished to the Barangay Captain and that listing could already be made available at the barangay hall.

It should be noted that although blood typing is one of the most common tests, it has never been conducted in this community and many of the residents in this area only found out their blood type that day. This only suggests that if there was no blood typing service provided, they would never have known their individual blood types even to this day. The blood typing activity was held at the barangay hall and about 157 residents had their blood type examined. The Medical Technology team who provided the blood typing service was composed of 12 students and the faculty coordinator. The students who voluntarily participated were glad to have joined the activity and shared with the extension coordinator that it was a learning experience for them. On the other hand, the residents who were served also felt satisfied as the services were brought to their place.

Stool Specimen Examination and De-worming. Stool examination was another activity conducted by the students of the department of Medical Technology. Only about 40 stool samples were submitted by the residents in the area for examination. There could have been more specimens if more samples were available during the time of the collection.

The stools collected were brought from Maluay to the laboratory of the Department of Medical Technology, situated at the second floor of Angelo King Building at Silliman University,

where the examination was done. The examination was made possible in due time with the voluntary participation of 6 Medical Technology students. The faculty coordinator confirmed the test results.

The results of the examination revealed that about 24 percent (9 out of 40) tested positive for parasitic infection. Eggs of ascaris (large intestinal round worms) and trichuris (whipworms) were present in these stool samples submitted.

The results further revealed that children were not the only ones affected but mothers, too. This suggested that parasitic infection in the area was prevalent. With this result, individuals who came during the presentation of results were each given deworming medications (Antiox), irrespective of stool examination results. This is both for cure and prevention of parasitic infection.

Lectures on Parasitic Infection and Dengue. A lecture series was also conducted among the mothers and children in the area. The lecturers put emphasis on the effects, causes, modes of transmission, prevention, and control of parasitism. Discussions were made and led by 7 volunteer students with the assistance and close supervision of the extension coordinator. They took turns during the discussion and presented at most two topics each. Among others, the topics covered were ascariasis, trichuriasis, enterobiasis, hookworm infections, stroglyloidiasis, amoebiasis, tapeworm infections, elephantiasis, and dengue. Discussions were facilitated with the use of teaching aides such as posters, drawings, diagrams, and preserved parasites. There was a lively discussion that transpired during the lecture series. Several queries were raised and the students were also able to answer them adequately and correctly. Everyone participated animatedly in the discussions but some felt somewhat frightened looking at the preserved worms taken from real infected individuals.

Problems and Mitigations

Although the conduct and implementation of the health program in Maluay was a success, it was not completely free

from shortcomings and problems. The problems, however, were not serious and were mitigated once they occurred.

One major problem encountered during the course of program presentation and implementation was seeking the approval of the Schools Division Office. It was a learning experience on the part of the program coordinator to realize that activities such as this require proper communication, starting from the top management down the line, especially in institutions where bureaucratic procedures are followed. This problem was, however, addressed by simply changing the entry point from the elementary school community through the mothers' association. This was also carried out successfully with the approval and help of the Barangay Captain.

Accomplishments

Despite the hindrances that were noted and encountered during the initiation and implementation process, the service-learning program of the Department of Medical Technology also has several achievements. First, it successfully provided blood typing services to at least 157 residents. A list of residents and their blood type is now available at the barangay hall since a copy of it was furnished to the Barangay Captain. The residents in the area could use the list for reference in the future when looking for potential blood donors.

Second, stool examination was carried out when the infected individuals were identified and de-worming medication was administered. The good point was that all who participated in the program were benefited since they all were given Antiox as a form of prophylaxis, irrespective of their parasite status.

Third, a lecture series was conducted successfully with a positive response from the participants. The participants were able to elucidate the importance of protecting themselves from various common intestinal parasitic infections. All pledged to clean their surroundings and

practice proper personal hygiene always. The participants saw that control and prevention of parasitic infection is of greater import and has more cost benefit than treatment.

Lastly and most importantly, the students were able to gain confidence and good camaraderie with their classmates and community people as well. They also gained efficiency and skills in the line of work they had chosen to do while at the same time learning good values and right work attitudes.

Experiences and Reflections of Students

As results of this community work showed, the conduct and implementation of the program was a success. In general, the students who have voluntarily participated were glad and were filled with contentment and joy for being able to practice their skills and extend their services. Some of them found the service-learning program a meaningful experience. Representative quotations from the reflection journals of students who participated or volunteered can serve as an inspiration for other students in the department to pursue what they had started.

One student particularly recounted that "I did it with love and I am not waiting for something in return." Another student said, "I developed my skills in dealing with real clients. . . I was happy to have volunteered in the group." One wrote also that she learned things money cannot buy, like self-esteem and cooperation. Another one stressed, "It was a wonderful outreach because everyone was benefited, not only the people whom we served but also ourselves."

Indeed, the service-learning project of the Department of Medical Technology has provided the students an avenue in which to practice and hone their skills. It has also made them aware of the value of cooperation and service above self.

Although it would be premature to say that the program was indeed a good one, suffice to say that the program has at least succeeded in making the partner community aware of their basic responsibilities in preserving life and health. There is a need,

according to some students who have voluntarily participated in this endeavor, to widen the coverage of the program and involve a greater number of participating students from various departments and colleges of the university. Some students also expressed the importance of improving the dissemination of health services available to them so that more residents will be encouraged to participate in the health project of the Department of Medical Technology.

Lastly, the students pointed out the need to monitor the progress of the community in terms of health status. However, the team believed that the initiative for this effort must come not only from Silliman University but it must also emanate from the community themselves. After all, what is most important is for the people to become self-reliant and empowered to respond to their health problems and needs. Making them aware of their condition and teaching them how to manage their own resources for better health are imperative in the future undertakings of the Department of Medical Technology. As it has always been said, an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure.