

Models for improving health education and training in Africa using OERs

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90 minutes

SUMMARY

This workshop will use interactive mapping techniques to explore the forces that may help or hinder the development and implementation of models for providing effective health education and training at scale utilising commonly derived open educational resources that are adaptable to the needs of different countries.

TARGET GROUP

Health educators, commissioners of health training in developing countries, health practitioners, civil society groups and Non-Governmental Organisations working in the field of health.

CONTEXT

The supply, retention and training of health professionals is in crisis in most Sub-Saharan African countries. For complex, multi-faceted reasons the health sector has had increasing difficulties in training sufficient numbers of professionals across a broad range of expertise from community public health to medical doctors. Poor salary levels and competition from occupations in the newly emerging knowledge economies are two interrelated factors. HIV/AIDS is also impacting significantly on health sector professionals. In some countries more health sector professionals are dying from the pandemic than are being produced through the training systems. There will be insufficient progress in reducing child and maternal deaths and tackling HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria unless greater efforts are made to achieve significant scale-up of health education and training across the region, while at the same time enabling individual countries to customise any provision to their own context. There is a need for improving the capacity for public health and primary care education and training, on increasing the number of clinical doctors and technicians as well as improving organisation and management systems. Meeting the needs of rural people is a key focus.

RESPONDING TO THE HUMAN RESOURCES FOR HEALTH CRISIS

There is a need to look at existing approaches that could be harnessed to upscale training and development of health professionals, for example through open and distance learning and the use of open educational resources. A model that can support this upscaling as well as engage in rigorous research and evaluation of what works, encompasses a systematic spreading of good practice, with a greater use of new information and communication technologies will have a key role to play in enabling Sub-Saharan African countries to address the human resources crisis in health.

OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR HEALTH EDUCATION IN AFRICA

New forms of communication technologies are having a dramatic impact on social and economic processes in society. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, such technologies have already created the conditions for local economic empowerment in hitherto undreamt of ways. The 'open educational resource' and 'open source' movement represents a new generation of innovation that moves beyond questions of technical capacity to the forms and nature of content and knowledge in a connected world. Open educational resources are a relatively new phenomenon and there are still many ambiguities around the concept, its function and purpose. There has been tremendous interest in open educational resources by universities, colleges, governments and international organisations. Arguments in support of open educational resources range from economic incentives (new business models, cutting costs for content development) to altruistic motives (sharing materials, methods and tools as a public good in itself and in line with academic traditions of sharing work in scholarly papers). Whilst there are many challenges surrounding the effective creation, organisation, access and utilisation of open educational resources, this development provides an opportunity for African

health education institutions, commissioners of education and health practitioners themselves to share high quality resources and expertise across the region and the world to support learning, teaching and research through access to materials that otherwise would be hard to obtain.

THE MODELS

The models needed to provide both scale and localisation need to draw on the experiences of the Open University's open-content initiatives (OpenLearn, Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa and Open Door) which variously employ new technologies and support systems for the professional development of educators and trainers who can in turn help develop and deliver appropriate open educational resources that in their turn can underpin education and training programmes for health professionals. In other words there needs to be a particular style and process of capacity building.

OpenLearn has state of the art learning support and collaboration tools to connect learners and educators and already covers a full range of subjects including health science at all study levels from access to postgraduate. Available online to learners and educators worldwide, the initiative is of particular significance in tackling educational disadvantage both within the developed and developing worlds. Health-related modules provided so far include primary care, social care, hospital care, nutrition, communication skills in health care, health and environment, childhood development, children and violence and healthy lifestyles.

Using the lessons learned from the Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa Programme, The Health Education and Training in Africa Programme aims to deliver student-focused health education for different cadres of health professionals across Africa, particularly those in shortage specialties and in under-resourced rural areas. It has the potential to reach hundreds of thousands of health professionals and to make a significant contribution to a rapid increase in capacity building in the health workforce in Africa and in the quality of health-care provision. The model will be developed and implemented in genuine partnership with health-care educators and practitioners in Africa to ensure that learning materials are developed in line with identified national need but also relevant to and fit for use in local contexts.

WORKSHOP

The workshop will look at challenges posed by the human resources for health crisis in respect of three key concerns: (i) new modes of pre-service and in-service training for health professionals (particularly work based training); (ii) the potential of new forms of communication technologies to support health education and development, particularly in rural contexts; (iii) the significance of 'open educational resources' in realising professional development through new modes of communication. It will be presented and facilitated by two academics from the Open University, Professor Andy Lane, the Director of OpenLearn and Lesley-Anne Cull, Senior Lecturer in Law in the Faculty of Health and Social Care and member of the Open University's Africa Strategy team.

Introduction (15 minutes)

The workshop will open with a short introduction and presentation that sets the context and outlines the key features of the Open University's open content initiatives, with particular reference to OpenLearn and the proposed Health Education and Training in Africa programme.

Group Activity (45 minutes)

Participants in the workshop will then be invited to undertake an activity in groups of five or six individuals that will help them engage with the issues of implementing these models 'on the ground'. The activity will require each group to address one of the three challenges outlined above by considering one or more of the following clusters of questions

1. What are the opportunities in developing new modes of training? What are the challenges? How might the latter be addressed?

2. How can new forms of communication technologies support health education and development, particularly in rural areas? What are the challenges? How might the latter be addressed?
3. How can open educational resources provide health education and training at scale that also meets local need? What are the benefits of using Open Educational Resources and what are the challenges? How might the latter be addressed?
4. Who are the key partners needed to implement open content models of health education and training? How do we identify these in different countries? How can partnerships be formed and what support structures are needed to maintain them?

Groups will be asked to discuss and document what they see as the both the main drivers for and the restraining forces potentially impacting on implementation of web-based models of learning. A number of focus questions (for example, what could promote or hinder institutional uptake? what is the role of the donor community in each country? how do we engage with governments?) will be provided to each group in order to direct the discussion. The workshop facilitators will spend time with each group supporting the discussions.

Plenary session (30 minutes)

Each group will be asked to feedback the main points arising from their discussion. In the remaining time available, whole group discussion will explore these and the key messages will be captured by the facilitators and form part of the report that will be available post-conference on the web.