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Regina's Student Run Health Clinic: Evaluation of Client and Volunteer Experiences



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ABSTRACT

Student run health clinics are programmed by student volunteers who work alongside mentors from various health professions to provide care to clients. The student run health clinic in Regina (SEARCH) has not been evaluated for its efforts in providing health services to the community of North Central Regina. The experiences of students volunteering at the clinic has also not been previously evaluated. The current study used qualitative, open-ended surveys designed by the researcher to interview clients and volunteers from the clinic. Clients were interviewed after their visit, and volunteers took an online survey. Results found that students appear to benefit from the experience of volunteering with low socioeconomic status (SES) clients. Clients appear to benefit from the educational programs, free meals, and interactions they receive at the clinic. Suggestions for improvement from both clients and volunteers included stable hours of operation, stability of programs each week, and more advertising to promote the programs at the clinic.

INTRODUCTION

Student run health clinics, staffed by students and mentors, do not target specific health conditions but rather address issues that are associated with low SES. The growing number of student run health clinics across Canada and the United States has led to research on the satisfaction of clients attending such clinics. Research investigating this question has shown that student run health clinics provide quality medical services to clients in both physical and psychological health (Buchanan & Witlen, 2006; Moskowitz, Glasco, Johnson, & Wang, 2006). The student-run health clinic in Regina, Saskatchewan provides health services to the low SES community of North Central. The majority of clients who use the clinic identify with being Aboriginal (88%) which is reflective of the high rate of Aboriginals living in the community. The purpose of the current study was to research the experiences of both clients and student volunteers who attend the clinic.

METHODS

- Participants were interviewed using qualitative, open-ended surveys.
- 17 clients were interviewed at the Regina student-run health clinic after their visit. Responses were recorded verbatim on an interview form by the researcher.
- 15 student volunteers participated in an online survey comprised of 8 open-ended questions.
- The interview data from both interviews were analyzed using thematic content analysis as described by Anderson (2007).



RESULTS

The present study found that students are benefiting from volunteering at a clinic targeting low SES clients and working alongside mentors from various health professions. Pertaining to the client experiences, the analysis found that clients are benefitting from not only the health care aspect of the clinic but also the educational programs, free meals, and interactions with student volunteers. Volunteers stated that they would like to receive more education from mentors and more opportunities to work with clients. Both volunteers and clients stated that the clinic should be more consistent with its programs and hours of operation. Both groups suggested that the clinic and its services should be more widely advertised in the community.

CONCLUSIONS

The current study found that both volunteers and clients are benefitting from the student-run health clinic in North Central Regina. The results of the present study are important to the evaluation of student run health clinics in North America that target a low SES population. In the future, these results may be used to compare the experiences of volunteers and clients in other clinics in Canada and the United States.

The current study will be used to help the SEARCH clinic improve its programs as well as provide information to other student run health clinics.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future directions for research in student run health clinics may involve comparison of the present study to other clinics in Canada. Many clinics across North America work with low SES individuals and it is important to determine whether clients and volunteers are having their specific needs met at such clinics.

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