



Implementation of an educational program for nursing students amidst the Ebola virus disease epidemic

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ABSTRACT

Background: The global Ebola virus disease (EVD) epidemic of 2014/2015 prompted faculty at Emory University to develop an educational program for nursing students to increase EVD knowledge and confidence and decrease concerns about exposure risk.

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to describe the development, implementation, and evaluation of the EVD Just-in-Time Teaching (JiTT) educational program.

Methods: Informational sessions, online course links, and a targeted, self-directed slide presentation were developed and implemented for the EVD educational program. Three student surveys administered at different time points were used to evaluate the program and change in students' EVD knowledge, confidence in knowledge, and risk concern.

Discussion: Implementation of a JiTT educational program effectively achieved our goals to increase EVD knowledge, decrease fear, and enhance student confidence in the ability to discuss EVD risk. These achievements were sustained over time.

Conclusion: JiTT methodology is an effective strategy for schools of nursing to respond quickly and comprehensively during an unanticipated infectious disease outbreak.

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Introduction

The Ebola virus disease (EVD) epidemic of 2014/2015 presented Atlanta-area health care providers, health care professions schools, and students a unique challenge to quickly prepare for the care of EVD-infected

aid workers from African countries affected by this disease. The decision to accept these patients resulted in the activation and expansion of the serious communicable diseases unit (SCDU) at Emory University Hospital (Feistritzer, Hill, Vanairsdale, & Gentry, 2014). Intense public interest followed the decision and resulted in tremendous media coverage. Between

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July 31 and September 22, 2014, >42,000 stories went out on broadcast and >18,000 print stories were written mentioning Emory and Ebola ([“Telling the Story,” 2014](#)). Some of the attention heightened the fear and anxiety associated with caring for individuals in our community because of the highly infectious nature of EVD. People spoke out on social media, fearing that our caring for these patients put our larger community at risk. In response to the public outcry, Susan Grant, the Chief Nurse for Emory Healthcare wrote in the Washington Post, “We can either let our actions be guided by misunderstanding, fear, and self-interest or we can lead by knowledge, science and compassion. We can fear, or we can care.” ([Grant, 2014](#)).

The Emory University Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing (NHWSN) is located on the same campus as Emory University Hospital and is also adjacent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Both the CDC and Emory Healthcare are key partners for the clinical and public health education of our student nurses. The treatment of patients with EVD at Emory University Hospital, combined with our CDC colleagues’ response to the EVD epidemic in Africa and the status of Atlanta being a major international transportation hub, necessitated a swift response by key public health faculty and administration of the NHWSN to educate our students and fellow faculty colleagues and staff members about EVD. EVD education needed to include modes of transmission, risk for exposure and transmission, signs and symptoms of infection, therapy, and counseling techniques to allay fear and anxiety associated with living in Atlanta and working or training within the health care facilities treating EVD-infected patients. It was our goal to increase EVD knowledge, decrease fear, and enhance students’ confidence in their ability to discuss EVD risk with family and friends.

Just-in-Time Teaching (JiT) is an online educational approach that can be used to rapidly disseminate important information in an efficient and effective way to address learning needs during a crisis ([Chotani et al., 2003](#)). JiT approaches have been used to quickly disseminate information after large-scale disasters and public health epidemics, such as the global outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) that occurred in the early 2000s ([O’Connor et al., 2009](#); [Yang et al., 2010](#)). Providing information expeditiously during complex humanitarian emergencies, such as a disease outbreak, is essential to quelling the fears of nursing students, who may encounter affected patients during clinical rotations, and communities who are uncertain about essential facts and who might be influenced by media coverage that at times dwells on unpleasant details and fuels the public’s apprehensions ([Stirling, Harmston, & Alsobayel, 2015](#); [“Teaching in a time,” 2015](#)). To respond to the emergent EVD epidemic, we designed a comprehensive and targeted approach to educate our students. The purpose of this article is to describe the development, implementation, and evaluation of this educational effort.

Methods

Dissemination of EVD Education

Early in the Fall Semester of 2014, we arranged for lunch-and-learn presentations, inviting all community members to learn more about the EVD outbreak in Africa. We invited colleagues from the CDC to present information about their experiences in Sierra Leone, one of the EVD-affected countries. Interested students and faculty attended other educational events at our university’s School of Public Health. Specific to information about the EVD patients being cared for at Emory’s SCDU, many attended a town hall meeting held jointly with the medical school where attendees heard directly from the SCDU team that was caring for the individuals with EVD.

In addition to the opportunities provided to learn more about EVD across our campus, the faculty decided that because our undergraduate nursing students were engaging in clinical training within the health care facility caring for patients with EVD, a more comprehensive and targeted approach to educate our students was needed. Additional goals for providing education were to increase student knowledge of EVD risks and ways to mitigate exposure, decrease fear of EVD, and enhance students’ confidence in discussing EVD with others, including family, friends, and patients. Faculty course coordinators of classes addressing professional role content for each cohort of undergraduate students created an Ebola information page on their electronic course sites. The Ebola information content included links to CDC, Emory Healthcare, and other Atlanta-area health care EVD policies and guidelines. In addition, a 23-slide PowerPoint presentation was developed using CDC guidelines and the newly developed Emory Healthcare Ebola Preparedness Protocols. The presentation, posted on the course sites, included an overview of the EVD outbreak, EVD facts, modes of transmission, signs and symptoms of early and later stage infection, Emory University’s EVD-specific travel policies, Emory Healthcare’s publically available Ebola Preparedness Protocols, and CDC’s published “Frequently Asked Questions” and answers. The presentation was designed for students’ self-directed viewing and learning.

Participants

Participants targeted for this educational program were all undergraduate student nurses enrolled in our prelicensure bachelor of science in nursing (BSN) program at NHWSN in Fall 2014 and Spring 2015. Inclusion criteria included all enrolled undergraduate students; there were no exclusion criteria. Sample size was determined by the size of the enrolled undergraduate student population. This target group consisted of a

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