



Research paper

Student-centered interventions the key to student health care worker influenza vaccination

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Received 9 June 2016; received in revised form 6 September 2016; accepted 6 September 2016

Available online 15 October 2016

KEYWORDS

Influenza, Human;
Vaccination;
Peer-led;
Health promotion;
Students;
Health care worker

Abstract *Objectives:* To investigate influenza vaccination uptake rates, attitudes and motivations towards influenza vaccination among student health care workers (HCWs).

Material and methods: Self-reported influenza vaccination uptake among student HCWs at The University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle, Western Australia (UNDAF) was surveyed before and after implementation of a peer-led, student-centered campaign to raise awareness of, and improve access to, influenza vaccination. Data were weighted and analysed using logistic regression.

Results: Pre-campaign influenza vaccination uptake was 36.3% (95% CI = 31.8–40.8%), with students identifying lack of awareness of both the Australian Government's recommendations and university policy, cost, and inconvenience of vaccine access as key barriers. Post-campaign vaccination coverage increased significantly to 55.9% (95% CI = 52.2–59.6%). Multivariate logistic regression, controlled for statistically insignificant confounders of age and gender, showed that being a student HCW in 2014 (campaign year) was significantly and independently associated with influenza vaccination (OR 2.2, 95% CI = 1.7–2.9, $P < 0.001$). Other significant factors were eligibility for National Immunisation Programme (NIP) funded vaccine (OR 12.3, 95% CI = 6.3–24.0, $P < 0.001$), employment as HCWs (OR 1.9, 95% CI = 1.5–2.6, $P < 0.001$), recalled campaign materials (OR 1.8, 95% CI = 1.2–2.7, $P = 0.002$) and enrolled in medicine (OR 1.6, 95% CI = 1.1–2.4, $P = 0.016$).

Conclusions: Student HCWs' influenza vaccination uptake improved significantly following a low-cost, peer-led promotional campaign. This approach can be adapted to other settings.

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Highlights

- Peer-led, student-centered campaign led to significant increase in vaccination uptake among student HCWs.
- Active engagement of relevant stakeholders in vaccination promotion and delivery is key to facilitating improved uptake.
- Greater emphasis on the tenets of professional accountability and responsibility among student HCWs to guide future practice.

Introduction

Influenza places a considerable burden on the Australian healthcare system [1,2]. Vaccination, the most effective preventive strategy, is recommended by the World Health Organization and Australia's Department of Health not only for at risk populations, but also health care workers (HCWs), including student HCWs [3–5]. Despite published literature demonstrating reduced disease burden when HCWs have high vaccination coverage [6–10], uptake of annual influenza vaccination among HCWs and student HCWs in many parts of Australia and some other countries is poor (16.3%–58.7%) [6–12].

Mandatory influenza vaccination in health care settings has been successful in increasing uptake to over 90% [13] but this approach is not the norm in Australia. Educational campaigns and provision of free vaccinations via mobile clinics have been effective in improving annual influenza vaccination uptake among Australian HCWs [11,13–16]. However, there is a need for evidence of their impact on student HCWs [11].

The University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle, Western Australia (UNDAF) offers bachelor degrees in medicine, nursing, midwifery and physiotherapy. The respective schools' vaccination policy (2014) recommends annual influenza vaccination for student HCWs [17–19]. In 2013, a baseline study identified the uptake of vaccination among student HCWs at the UNDAF to be 36.3% [12]. Lack of awareness of both the Australian Government and the university recommendations and policy regarding influenza vaccination of HCWs (including students) cost, and inconvenience to access vaccines were identified as key barriers [12]. An on-campus vaccination clinic was explored but not approved by the University's risk manager as there is no medical clinic on campus. However, student HCWs can access influenza vaccination for free from all hospital placements, and some community and GP placement sites during the influenza vaccination season. The current study aimed to assess the impact of a peer-led influenza vaccination campaign on vaccine uptake among student HCWs.

Materials and methods

Education and promotional campaign March–June 2014

The deans, campus and clinical placement staff of UNDAF's medicine, nursing and midwifery, and physiotherapy

schools, infection control co-coordinators at clinical placement sites, and student organisations participated in the planning and implementation process of this campaign. These people were noted to be key stakeholders as their approval and/or support was essential to the successful roll-out and implementation of both the awareness campaign and the subsequent evaluation survey.

Key students served as advocates and the 'faces' of the campaign. These peer champions were identified as influential figures by their respective student organisations as either being leaders or role models who commanded respect among their peers and had volunteered their time to advocate for, and serve, their fellow students. The campaign envisioned that students would be more likely to respond positively to the influenza vaccination message if it was being promoted by one of their own. Therefore, peer champions were up-skilled on the evidence base behind the policy, efficacy and risks of influenza vaccination, and provided with information about convenient locations where student HCWs could access free or low cost influenza vaccination. This information was also compiled into a pamphlet (printed and electronic) for peer champions to disseminate. Peer champions participated in both the planning and the implementation stages of the campaign. They also delivered weekly reminders at lectures and through cohort specific social media outlets. University staff, both on campus and at clinical placement sites, also provided information on, and advocated for the annual influenza vaccination to the student HCWs as well as disseminating pamphlets.

School-specific campaign posters (Fig. 1) were developed featuring the peer champions and appealing to the student HCWs' duty of care, professional responsibility and accountability. Two hundred, colour, A3 size prints were displayed around the university campus and clinical placements sites along with more specific information about influenza vaccination, its benefits, costs and options for free or low cost access. The campaign's emphasis on duty of care, professional responsibility and accountability was based on both ideology and evidence. One of the key findings from the 2013 semi-structured interviews was the gap in knowledge and understanding of the role of student HCWs in influenza vaccination program, so the campaign was designed in part to address this key finding. The ideological basis of this intervention is the mission of the University to graduate student HCWs who not only contribute significantly to the health care system but also demonstrate exemplary ethical and professional behaviour as prescribed by the core curriculum of the University [20].

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