

EXPERIENTIAL COMMUNITY HEALTH PROMOTION: THE UITM 'SMILE' EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: To increase the awareness of oral health professionals/public regarding new norms in oral health services delivery via mobile applications, website, and webinars via communication engagement learning.

Methods: The programme was undertaken within the postgraduate Doctor in Dental Public Health course at the Faculty of Dentistry, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. The activity was in the form of a digitalized health promotion programme. The programme included didactic teaching, practical sessions, and experiential learning'. Students were introduced to the fundamentals of organising an Oral health Campaign, website development, app development, and virtual promotion. They were also advised on interagency negotiation and collaboration, advocacy skills, effective communication, content development, project management and evaluation processes.

Results: Engagement analytics indicated more than 49000 online viewers within the first 30 days of the event.

Feedback by the stakeholders suggested that the programme was conducted successfully, however there were opportunities for improvement. The evaluation of the programme by participants showed that more than 90% agreed that the programme met its objectives in terms of aim, content, and effectiveness.

Conclusions: The experiential Community Health Promotion programme is able to achieve the expected learning outcomes from the perspective of both students and staff members.

Keywords: Community Engagement Learning, Dental Public Health, Experiential Learning, SMILE, Virtual Engagement

1. INTRODUCTION

The field of public health in general, and health education and promotion in particular, is fueled by a longstanding commitment to improve health and prevent disease and mortality in local and global communities through research and practice (Rosenstock, L., Helsing, K., & Rimer, B. K. 2011). Schools and programs of public health must equip public health professionals to conduct community health assessments that can be subsequently used by community partners to inform programs, policies, and interventions (Petersen, P. E., & Kwan, S. 2004). This skill must also extend to include the ability to disseminate knowledge and empower communities to bring about positive change through advocacy, health promotion programs and strategies.

Community-engaged learning (CEL) or experiential learning can provide students with many opportunities to directly apply skills in real-world settings and community organizations (Lund, D. E., & Bragg, B. 2020). CEL is broadly defined as structured learning experiences within the context of a community setting. It can include experiences such as practical and internships as well as applied projects required for course completion. The experiential learning within the context of this paper refers to a project-based assignment designed to allow students to master specific competencies as part of dental public health training at a specialist level.

This programme, themed “smile together and we smile forever’ is hoped to be able to serve as a platform for intellectual discourse amongst the dental fraternities, for sharing knowledge and disseminating information, to the professionals as well as to the general public towards achieving an ideal and optimum oral health service during the current covid 19 pandemics.

2. METHOD

This programme integrates the use of information and communications in managing a range of events and activities. The programme emphasizes the management and marketing of events through their entire process, from the initial idea, planning, and logistics to post-event evaluation. Considering the restrictions, we faced due to the lockdown phase of the pandemic at the time, we had no choice but to fully digitalize the entire programme, whereby the entire experiential community engagement was moved to a virtual platform. The programme allowed the postgraduate students to fully experience the community engagement and rigors of planning a major project at a time of strict movement control order.

A website and mobile app were developed to serve as a facilitator and mediator to convey the essence of the program throughout the implementation. It consists of promotion and updates on campaign activities such as officiation ceremony, webinars, mobile application and TikTok competition. Apart from that, the added value of this website is that it also provides the dental personnel and public with information about new norms and new standard operating procedures in oral healthcare delivery, general knowledge regarding Covid-19 and vaccines, and oral health-related knowledge.

The main agenda for the programme was a series of webinars conducted and streamed live on YouTube. The webinar was conducted in collaboration with multiple stakeholders from the dental industry namely, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Defense, Malaysian Dental Association, Malaysian Dental Public Health Association, Glaxo Smith Kline, Colgate Palmolive Berhad. Engagement analytics was monitored throughout the event and feedback was sought from the stakeholders at the conclusion of the event.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The programme garnered an audience of over 7,000 people through the 5 day-webinar, over 1,000 YouTube subscribers, 9,000 website visitors and over 500 Instagram followers. The YouTube channel received over 49,000 viewers from 16 different countries within the first 30 days of the event indicating the wide reach and impact of the event.

Table 1 shows the feedback from 3 of the main collaborators for the event. Participant feedback for the webinar showed over 90% of rated very good and above in terms of programme implementation, duration, setting appropriateness, content, and knowledge improvement. Participants also indicated that the webinars were successful in improving their skills, motivation, and commitment to oral health.

Table 1: Stakeholder feedback of the programme

| Stakeholder/ strategic partner | STRENGTH |
|---|---|
| Oral Health Division, Ministry of Health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Interesting, short and easy-to-mention program titles with topics appropriate to the current covid-19 pandemic status. b. A comprehensive program, each webinar is presented by speakers from various agencies who are skilled, suitable, and coincident with the topic. The involvement of Public Figures as a panel in the webinar session is an interesting strategy for and should be continued. c. Extensive promotion through various social media mediums provides opportunities for various age categories of users. d. The medium used, virtually in accordance with the current situation, has given the people the opportunity to participate regardless of location and without borders. e. The program runs smoothly with fast and efficient technical support. E f. A very cost-effective programme |
| Malaysian Association of Dental Public Health Specialist (MADPHS) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Excellent handling, especially from a technical point of view. An excellent attempt to challenge oneself to the maximum level. b. Determining the individual responsible for "serving" the chat room is very good. c. The use of various social media is very good in increasing the reach of the message to a wider target group. d. The high number of views for each forum should be commended. |
| Malaysia Dental Association (MDA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The theme is so apt for the current situation. Well planned webinars and good line-up of speakers. b. Good strategy on the promotion activities. |
| Stakeholder/ strategic partner | WEAKNESSES |
| Oral Health Division, Ministry of Health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Not enough involvement of the strategic partner in the planning and execution of the programme b. Webinars through YouTube limit access to users, there are users who are unable to access the facilities at work due to online restrictions by the department. Extensive promotion through various social media mediums provides opportunities for various age categories of users. c. The medium of communication is English and Bahasa Malaysia only. Subtitles, if available, can help viewers who are not proficient in the medium of this language. d. Limited time for the question-and-answer session meant that many questions could not be answered. e. Broadcast hours - most webinars are held on weekdays and office hours - although the broadcast is recorded, but cannot participate in interactive sessions |

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| Malaysian Association of Dental Public Health Specialist (MADPHS) | a. There were some minor technical glitches during the opening ceremony. |
| Malaysia Dental Association (MDA) | a. Not enough public engagement. |
| Stakeholder/ strategic partner | OPPORTUNITY |
| Oral Health Division, Ministry of Health | <p>a. Virtual delivery provides an opportunity for access without boundaries. Information can be delivered to the community directly and problems can be solved immediately.</p> <p>b. The SMILE program can be continued, and dental health promotion is strengthened to be implemented more often on social media and not just limited to the season this program is implemented.</p> |
| Malaysian Association of Dental Public Health Specialist (MADPHS) | a. More active involvement of strategic partners in program planning in the future. |
| Malaysia Dental Association (MDA) | <p>a. Make it an annual event.</p> <p>b. An opportunity to see how far / how much has this event reached out on social media? Like, how many “hits” / “likes” ... and so on.</p> |
| Stakeholder/ strategic partner | THREAT |
| Oral Health Division, Ministry of Health | <p>a. Technical and internet line disruptions are a threat to the SMILE program, especially if there is disruption to the panel line.</p> <p>b. Access especially for viewers in areas where there is no internet</p> |
| Malaysian Association of Dental Public Health Specialist (MADPHS) | <p>a. Technical issues since the program is conducted entirely online.</p> <p>b. The speaker was unable to attend at the last minute.</p> <p>c. The program may not achieve the targeted objectives such as increasing public awareness regarding the new norms of dental services.</p> <p>d. Social media continuity created after the program is over.</p> |
| Malaysia Dental Association (MDA) | a. None |

4. CONCLUSION

The programme is considered to have successfully achieved its objectives in and disseminating information, to the professionals as well as to the general public towards achieving an ideal and optimum oral health service during the current Covid-19 pandemic from the perspective of the reach of the programme and its impact on the participants and stakeholders. The next ‘SMILE’ programme will incorporate a physical outreach programme and include a bigger pool of industry and community partners.

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