

Starting with the Classroom: Updating Family Planning Knowledge in East Africa



Participants in family planning workshop

In East Africa, a dedicated midwifery tutor is working hard to train students but worries that she isn't teaching them the latest information and techniques. Many of her fellow instructors are in the same situation. "We had our last refresher training ten years ago," she laments.

In many of the region's nursing and midwifery schools, challenges include outdated information and inadequate opportunities to practice new skills. These shortcomings can mean that graduates' knowledge and skills may be insufficient once they begin working. "Many nurses who are providing service have never been updated on new issues [in family planning]," observes a faculty member from Tumaini University Faculty of Nursing in Tanzania. "It will be our responsibility to see how we can help as a training institution because we will send our students to some of these clinics."

To build instructors' capacity and address the knowledge gaps, the Capacity Project partnered with East, Central and Southern Africa (ECSA) Health Community and Africa's Health in 2010 to deliver a week-long workshop on Contemporary Issues in Family Planning for midwifery tutors in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

Held in Dar es Salaam in April 2008, the workshop updated the knowledge of 22 tutors and enabled them to teach their students more effectively. A quantitative and qualitative evaluation showed the workshop to be highly successful. Average scores climbed from 58% on the pre-test to 81% on the post-test.

"It has been great teaching my students family planning," a participant from Kenya Medical Training College enthuses. "The materials I got from the workshop helped me a lot. The updates have spiced my lectures. Some of the content that I was able to add includes healthy timing and spacing of pregnancy, medical eligibility criteria, Standard Days Method/cycle beads and postpartum family planning. I am also going to take the students through family planning in the context of HIV/AIDS."

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"We have already incorporated the contraceptive technology updates [from the workshop] into the training curricula (Certificate and Diploma Nursing curricula), and we are also planning to update the Advanced Diploma and Degree Nursing curricula," explains a nursing officer from the Tanzania Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.

After the workshop, a lecturer from Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences in Tanzania was eager to get started: "The students were still doing their clinical MCH [maternal and child health] rotations, so I discussed with them about quality improvement in family planning services using the six dimensions assessment tool and root cause analysis. They were assigned to make an assessment of these two clinics and make presentations and discussions with the clinic staff. They did so, and the clinic staff were very cooperative and happy to have their feedback. They concluded that some areas were within the facility level of improvement and agreed to work on them. I now feel very comfortable teaching family planning to my students."

Ninety-four percent reported that they have used the workshop information and resources to update their colleagues. "Other lecturers who teach the degree course at this university college need to be trained on family planning updates, because when I shared the updates they were very excited," comments a participant from Tumaini University. A tutor from Arua Nursing School in Uganda emphasizes that "the information should spread to other tutors and service providers in the whole ECSA region."

Going forward, a CD of family planning training materials used in the workshop is being disseminated to support instructors and practitioners in Anglophone Africa. The Capacity Project is providing organizational support and technical assistance to the Kitui campus of Kenya Medical Training College, one of the training institutions represented in the workshop, with the goal of helping it to become a Center of Family Planning Excellence in the region.

A lecturer from Tumaini University makes a final point: "Thank you for the Handbook [*Family Planning: A Global Handbook for Providers*]; it is now a key reference for obstetricians and gynecologists in our hospital. We handle it like an egg!"

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Hands-on learning at the workshop

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