

"Immunization Competencies and an Online Immunization Course"

McIntyre, C., RN, BScN, Associate Nurse Epidemiologist, and Miroslaw, C., RN(c), BSN, Vaccine Educator, British Columbia Centre for Disease Control, Vancouver, BC, Canada

Background

Health care professionals have a role as vaccine providers, educators and advocates for immunization.

In 2001, British Columbia initiated an Immunization Competency Program for nurses working in public health settings. The initial program was paper-based, with an open book written exam.

In 2003, a provincial working group revised this basic exam and transitioned from a paper-based to a web-based format¹. An "overview" document outlined areas for study prior to taking the examination, and references for each area (for example, vaccinology, vaccine preventable diseases, specific vaccines.) A "Skills Check List" was designed to assess the nurse's skills at providing immunization in a clinic setting.

In 2008, The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) published "Immunization Competencies for Health Professionals"². This national handbook includes topics for effective immunization that are universal to a wide range of health professionals. The competencies range from knowledge of the scientific basis of immunization to essential immunization practices and contextual issues relevant to immunization. Each competency is supported by a learning domain and a number of guiding learning objectives. The immunization competencies provide the framework stakeholders can use to tailor education programs to the needs of health professionals based on their level of experience, practice setting, and degree of involvement with immunization.

Project Description

The "Immunization Competencies for Health Professionals" national handbook informed the development of a British Columbia Online Immunization Course. The targeted health professional at the outset of course development was the novice practitioner, "the nurse new to public health." We changed the order of the national competencies so that each course module (a competency) would build on the learning from a previous module. We created a separate module for Immunization Schedules, and expanded "Immunization Issues" into two "Communication" modules. We also developed a resource titled "Immunization Competencies for BC Health Professionals"³ which outlined these revised competencies and the learning objectives for the competency. The sixteen course modules move the learner from "vaccine preventable diseases" through the immune system and the vaccine immune response to guidelines for practice specific to British Columbia's immunization program. Legal and ethical issues, communication with parents, and the Canadian Immunization System are also addressed. The modules provide video clips, interactive diagrams and links to relevant journal articles and recommended immunization sites. Quiz questions in modules are designed to "check your understanding" and activities are suggested to facilitate knowledge application in the practice setting.

Results

The course was initially offered to nurses working in public health settings, and was used as part of the preparation of a “nurse new to public health” to gain knowledge about immunization and immunization issues.

However, a priority in the Strategic Framework for Immunization in BC was to ensure an adequate supply of knowledgeable, trained service providers, and to expand the range of professionals that would provide immunization services. With pandemic influenza looming in 2009, both Pharmacists and Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) needed a training program that would expand their role as immunizers, and the BC Online Immunization Course was determined to be a course that would be required for immunization certification for these groups. The course has since been used by nursing and pharmacy students, Registered Nurses in settings outside of public health, and Registered Psychiatric Nurses.

Next Steps

The diversity of course users has led to an environmental scan of undergraduate educational curricula within BC (medicine, nursing, pharmacy, midwifery and LPN programs) to look at what courses/course materials address the competencies for immunization. Feedback from course users who provide immunization services primarily to adults has led to a working group that will add more adult-focused content and references to the course, making the course more relevant for “adult” immunizers. A survey of current and past course users will be undertaken in 2011 to evaluate the mode and design of the program, and to assess the appropriateness of the content as it relates to the “Immunization Competencies for BC Health Professionals”⁴ at the level of a beginning practitioner.

Acknowledgements

Alice Wong, Surveillance Analyst, Epidemiology Services, BC Centre for Disease Control, for the structural design of the course in the online platform.

Wendy Leung and Cleo Chan, Coop students, University of Victoria, Health Information Science program, for their technical support to course users.

References

1. 39th National Immunization Conference, Washington, DC (2005) Workshop 3, Immunization Competency Assessment Program
2. Public Health Agency of Canada (2003) Immunization Competencies for Health Professionals, available at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/index-eng.php>
3. BC Centre for Disease Control (2009) Immunization Competencies for BC Health Professionals, available at <http://www.bccdc.ca/imm-vac/ForHealthProfessionals/ImmsCompetency.htm>

Correspondence: Cheryl McIntyre, RN, BsCN, Immunization Program, BC Centre for Disease Control, 655 West 12 Avenue, Vancouver, BC, Canada, V5Z 4R4
Tel. (604) 707-2577
cheryl.mcintyre@bccdc.ca