SA Breastfeeding Program

Babyfriendly On-line Education Program
(E-learning) Evaluation

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Executive Summary

This evaluation of the Breastfeeding E-learning program was commissioned by the South Australian Breastfeeding Program, Centre for Health Promotion, Children, Youth and Women’s Health Service.

The South Australian Community Health Research Unit (SACHRU) undertook an evaluation of the Breastfeeding E-learning Program, currently administered under the auspices of Children, Youth and Women’s Health Service (CYWHS), to explore the participant experience of the program, the quality of program components and the impact of the program on breastfeeding practice. The evaluation captured the experience and perspectives of key stakeholders and program participants through face to face and telephone interviews, focus groups, participant observation and on-line surveys. Overall participants found the program to be evidence based, well structured and of high quality.

The Breastfeeding E-learning program was initiated by the SA Department of Health, Health Promotion Branch to encourage and support South Australian hospitals to become Baby Friendly Health Initiative (BFHI) accredited. The breastfeeding E-learning program is an online stand alone program which can be delivered with the support of a facilitator or undertaken independently by the participant. The program provides a means for health services to meet the educational requirement for BFHI accreditation. The E-learning project is one component of a broader state-wide breastfeeding promotion strategy.

Partnerships with major hospitals, TAFESA and key breastfeeding organisations were developed leading to a strong sense of ownership by all key stakeholders. An Editorial Committee has a key function in reviewing the content, relevance and outcomes of the E-learning program. This role would be enhanced by clear terms of reference and communication protocols. Greater transparency and clarity regarding the governance, implementation and monitoring of outcomes of the E-learning program would improve understanding and clarity regarding lines of accountability and desired outcomes.

This evaluation found the Breastfeeding E-learning Program to be an accessible, low cost means of meeting the training requirements of the BFHI accreditation. The program provides an educational framework for delivering a basic, minimum level of breastfeeding knowledge to nursing staff and midwives in order to promote a cohesive approach to breastfeeding within an organisation. The numbers of participants who have enrolled and completed the course are testament to its accessibility and relevance to its primary target audience. The uptake of the E-learning program by other professional groups has been poor. It is likely that significant modification and marketing would be required to accommodate the needs and increase uptake of these groups.
Best practice frameworks for E-learning recognise that on-line teaching and learning is different to that of traditional educational methods. Consideration should be given to how information can be most effectively delivered within the on-line learning environment. In addition, options for student support and study facilitation also require consideration.

Participants experienced some frustration with the nature and structure of the quizzes embedded within the program. Participants suggested that a greater use of case scenarios and problem solving tasks would be helpful aids to learning. The challenge of the need for program developers to understand educational pedagogy whilst providing high quality clinical education information was highlighted.

The E-learning program has been successfully implemented using a facilitated group learning model. Peer discussion of experiences combined with the knowledge of the course facilitator has the potential to greatly increase the quality of learning. Suggestions are made to improve the group E-learning experience to maximise learning potential.

Many suggestions were provided to improve the administration and content of the Breastfeeding E-learning program. Participants and facilitators require clear written information about registration, computer literacy, course expectations, program navigation and reporting availability. Cultural inclusivity was identified as a major need to be addressed for both content and presentation of information. Particular attention should be paid to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. This needs to be considered in terms of both supporting culturally respectful and appropriate practice and also ensuring the program meets the needs of culturally diverse students. Administrative improvements included greater clarity and understanding of key stakeholders in regards to ongoing evaluation and reporting requirements. Many of the content suggestions provided by participants would require additional funding to implement.

Participants identified that government and organisational support for BFHI accreditation, clear policies and procedures and a well equipped working environment to promote breastfeeding are essential to ensuring that the E-learning program recommendations are translated into practice change. Evaluation results indicated that the E-learning program of itself will not lead to practice change and it is unrealistic to expect it to do so. The E-learning program does however, successfully support knowledge acquisition and consistency of practice among staff in relation to breastfeeding.

Some participants suggested that there may be a need for a more advanced program containing information about more complex breastfeeding issues. A thorough needs assessment of this is required together with consideration of the most appropriate learning format and auspice should this be a potential option.
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