

Chapter 11

Use of Information and Communication Technology by Health Care Providers for Continuing Professional Development in Botswana

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ABSTRACT

The impact of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the social and economic lives of people including the area of education cannot be overemphasized. Continuing education is an important vehicle for maintaining and improving professional standards and keeping in synch with the latest trends in the profession, especially for health care providers. Hinged on literature review, document review and case study, this chapter aims to elaborate on the importance of continuing professional development (CPD) to health and medical care, and how ICTs can be used as a platform for CPD. Focusing on Botswana as a case study, the chapter explores challenges and issues faced by health care providers in using ICTs to access CPD and includes solutions and recommendations. Challenges identified included underdeveloped ICT infrastructure and limited use of available ICT resources by health care providers.

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INTRODUCTION

The health practice environment is ever evolving, resulting in the need for health care professionals to maintain clinical expertise through continuing professional development (Hew & Hara, 2007). Described as a way to ensure that professionals maintain specific knowledge and skills necessary for acceptable standards of practice, continuing professional development is an essential requirement for lifelong learning. Most health professionals belong to professional bodies that require members to undergo registration for licensure, and thereafter, the professionals are expected to register for regular re-licensure. They are thus expected to go through lifelong learning commonly referred to as continuing professional development (CPD).

CPD is a way of increasing professional knowledge and skills in order to improve performance (Mugisha, 2009). It serves to upgrade professionals' knowledge and skills so that they can respond to the needs of people under their care, and appreciate technological advances, health care reforms and changes in professional education and practice. By making a conscious effort to update their professional knowledge, the health care provider improves competencies and personal performance that may enhance career progression. One way of updating professional knowledge is through the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have become part of everyday life and are synonymous with television, internet, email, mobile phone, CD-ROM, DVD, hand-held personal devices and an ever-growing array of new inventions (Maguire & Zhang, 2007). ICT has been defined as the use of technologies that enable communication and transmission of information by electronic ways (Mugisha, 2009).

The positive impact of ICT is being felt in the social and economic lives of people especially in the area of education. Noor-Ul-Amini (2013) observed that one of the most vital contributions of ICT in the field of education is easy access to learning. Noor-Ul-Amini (2013) describes one of the benefits of ICT as increasing flexibility of delivery of education so that learners can access knowledge anytime and anywhere. Rolls, Hansen, Jackson & Elliot (2016) see information technology and internet as having revolutionized communication to such an extent that humans can communicate anywhere at any time using highly interactive social media platforms. New information and communication technologies overcome barriers of distance and time, and significantly improve the accessibility of information and knowledge. As a result, the sharing of information and knowledge quickly and effectively becomes feasible and acts as a key element in achieving development goals and mitigating the impact of unforeseen events such as natural disasters and outbreaks of disease (Kallander et al., 2013).

ICT use in the health care system can improve knowledge and skills of health care providers and in turn enable them to provide quality health care services. The nature, trends and emergence of diseases and health care innovations require a workforce that is well informed about current health care issues and delivery approaches. ICT is an important medium of distributing current and valuable information to health care professionals and clients in various areas.

The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on the importance of continuing professional development (CPD) to health care, and how ICTs can be used as a platform for CPD. The focus of the chapter is on Botswana as a case study, and aims to identify the challenges and issues faced by health care providers in using ICTs to access CPD. The chapter also considers possible solutions and recommendations to meet the challenges and issues. The case study is based on a mini survey that was conducted among health care providers in 2016.

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