

Understanding of the role of surveillance in Health Promotion for NCDs among Georgians

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Abstract

Background: Recognizing the need to build local capacity for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and having a skilled workforce is an important strategy to implement the policy changes necessary to reduce the burden of NCDs. Indicators of tobacco smoking, alcohol consumption and drug abuse are still very high among Georgians. Nine out of ten deaths are attributed to cardio-vascular diseases (CVD), cancer and injuries, the majority of which are caused by unhealthy behaviors. There is a very unclear understanding of health promotion (HP) approaches as a best opportunity to impact on NCDs and their risk factors even among Georgian professionals and more at the population level. The present study is the first effort to identify gaps, requirements and opportunities in the health-promotion communication system in Georgia, in order to identify the needs of capacity building for NCDs and their risk factors. **Purpose:** The Health Promotion Capacity Assessment aimed to evaluate the current health promotion system in Georgia. It covers the following issues: quality of health promotion/communication and disease prevention services, access to services, resources, health-promotion information/communication system and health-promotion financing. Its specific aims were (1) To identify the shortfalls, requirements and opportunities in health-promotion communication through quantitative and qualitative research; and (2) To define and analyze healthcare workers' knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) related to health promotion/communication aspects, the level of the professional development and requirements for their future training/retraining.

Study/Intervention Design: Mixed method - quantitative and qualitative research

Methods: The research methodology was developed by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC&PH) based on recommendations made by an internal UNICEF expert. The following methods were used: quantitative research health communication

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capacity assessment - healthcare personnel; and qualitative research - analysis of focus group discussion findings, and analysis of data of in-depth interviews. The respondents (healthcare professionals and experts from other fields) were selected randomly in the 5 regions of Georgia. Two hundred healthcare workers in primary healthcare settings were selected. Questionnaires for each group of respondents were developed. Results: The majority of participants noted that there is no legal and normative basis for health promotion. A National Health Promotion Strategy has been developed recently but its implementation is highly unlikely, as there is neither enforcement mechanism nor relevant financial support. HP and prevention of the NCDs are not a priority for Georgia. There is a lack of reliable methodologies on undertaking research, data gathering and analysis in the country. Information related to HP topics such as healthier eating, dangers of tobacco, physical activity, alcohol abuse, prevention of injuries, etc, is insufficient and not evidence based. In order to implement HP related activities, and to train and retrain professionals, it is necessary to possess, develop and improve the relevant physical-technical resources. The limitations in human resources are caused in part by the inefficient work of relevant bodies (due to absence of financial resources). It shows the need for essential additional resources, both intellectual and financial, which would make it possible to plan valuable interventions. The health communication system is unsatisfactory in Georgia, with a lack of a mechanism for inter-institutional cooperation, lengthy procedures connected with written communication, etc.

Conclusion: One of the most significant problems in the Georgian healthcare system is the inadequacy of human resources, lack of understanding of necessity to build local capacity for NCD advocacy. Recognizing that health promotion approaches to NCD prevention is a development issue, is a critical issue for Georgians and that effectiveness in reducing the burden of NCDs depends on a workforce that is equipped with the core health promotion and other public health skills to implement current knowledge, policies and practices.