

A Campaign to Improve Seasonal Influenza Immunizations in a University Health & Wellness Clinic: A Case Study

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Introduction

Seasonal influenza is a serious disease resulting in considerable illness, mortality, and financial burden (Molinari, Ortega-Sanchez, Messonnier, Thompson, Wortley, Wentraub & Bridges, 2007). It is well known that the most effective and readily available method for reduction in morbidity, loss of life, and monetary demand is the influenza vaccine, developed more than 80 years ago (Barberis, Myles, Ault, Bragazzi, & Martin, 2016). Even so, many healthy individuals do not consider seasonal flu to be a dangerous healthcare risk and find it troublesome to seek out vaccination due to hectic lifestyles. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends 70% of individuals over the age of 6 months be vaccinated annually against seasonal influenza, although it is historically recognized that this percentage is not met (Healthy People 2020; CDC, 2019).

Review of Literature

The flu season of 2017-2018 was inordinately harsh in the United States; the disease accounted for approximately 45,000,000 illnesses, 21,000,000 healthcare provider visits, 810,000 hospitalizations, and 61,000 deaths (CDC, 2019). The financial costs can be overwhelming including lost wages, medical expenses, and severe ongoing health consequences. Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc. (2018), estimated that over \$21 billion would be lost due to workers becoming ill with influenza. Putri, Muscatello, Stockwell, and Newall (2018), reported in the 2014-2015 flu season, the burden to the healthcare system and society was estimated at \$11.2 billion. The university has the unique advantage of a Nursing Health and Wellness Clinic (NHWC) located on the campus staffed by Department of Nursing faculty who volunteer their services. The NHWC was established in early 2018. During the NHWC's inaugural year, as faculty and staff were initially seen, they were asked to complete a health screen regarding prior influenza vaccines. It was noted that many could not recall or admitted to not being immunized.



It became evident, through these conversations, that receiving the flu vaccine was not a priority, and appeared that many were neither worried about getting the flu nor motivated to prevent it. In response to this, a seasonal influenza immunization campaign was undertaken by nursing faculty in conjunction with undergraduate students registered in a community health

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to disseminate the findings of a study describing the efforts of the WTAMU NHWC regarding improved seasonal influenza immunization compliance on campus. Anecdotal evidence via informal conversations led the nursing faculty to hypothesize that non-nursing faculty and staff may not have sought immunization elsewhere had this attempt not been made. Therefore, the aim of this study was to survey those who received their immunization on campus or at the NHWC to determine whether this population would have sought their flu vaccine elsewhere, had it not been made available in this manner.

Findings

We received 106 completed surveys for a response rate of 61%. Of the 106 respondents, 44% reported that they would not have sought out the seasonal flu immunization had it not been made available on the university campus.

Most importantly, when asked where on campus they received their immunization, only 41% physically came to the NHWC, while 59% were provided the vaccine in their departmental workplace. Of those individuals receiving immunization in their office or workplace, 38% reported that had it not been provided in this venue, they would not have gone to the NHWC or elsewhere seeking the vaccine. When asked about whether they had previously been immunized, 61% individuals reported having received an influenza immunization during the 2017-2018 season. The remaining 39% of respondents either could not recall or denied receiving the vaccine. However, when asked about their intentions to be immunized in the 2019-2020 season, 90% of participants related positive intention to receive the seasonal flu immunization.

Finally, when asked whether they became ill with the flu after immunization, 92% replied no. Of those individuals who reported becoming ill after receiving their immunization (n=9), 6 stated that they tested positive for influenza virus. Although we did not collect data on the severity of the illness for those surveyed who reported contracting the flu, research indicates that immunization lessens the severity of the symptoms (Bekkat-Berkani & Romano-Massotti, 2018).

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