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Introduction

Establishing an understanding of the Millennium Development Goals (UNMDGs) is a key step to creating knowledgeable, innovative and effective health leaders of the future. Currently, there is limited awareness of the UNMDGs among academic institutions. To address this, the Universitas 21 Health Sciences UNMDG interest group was formed to create an educational strategy for UNMDG training for academic institutions within the U21 network. We aimed to explore the impact on students’ knowledge of the UNMDGs, following participation in a series of UNMDG workshops involving specifically developed UNMDG case studies.

Methods

Health professional students from a multitude of disciplines attended one of seven UNMDG global workshops, consisting of lectures, small group tutorials and large group discussions. Eight UNMDG case studies were trialled. Data from individual evaluations was collected using a previously piloted evaluation tool, and quantitative and qualitative analysis was performed.

Results

A total of 975 students participated in the workshops, with a response rate of 85%. Mean age of 22.6 years, and 56% of attendees were female.

Student’s Knowledge Change

Nearly forty percent of students indicated they had unsatisfactory knowledge of the UNMDGs prior to attending the workshop. There was a significant increase in students’ knowledge of the UNMDGs following participation in the workshop. (Figures 3A and B).

Discussion

Our study highlights a critical gap in the current university health professional curriculum with regard to the Millennium Development Goals, and demonstrates how the U21 UNMDG workshops and case studies can make a significant and immediate positive impact on a student’s awareness of the UNMDGs. Although students attending these workshops were enrolled in a health professional discipline, it is surprising that nearly 40% of them indicated that they had unsatisfactory knowledge of the UNMDGs prior to attending the workshop. Other important themes identified by students during the workshops included an improved understanding of the relationship of the UNMDGs to the students’ own local setting, and the impact of culture on health. This is of particular relevance to countries such as Australia, where there are still major disparities between the health outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Conclusion

We have shown that a significant increase in awareness and understanding of the UNMDGs among health professional students can be achieved through the conduct of discipline specific and interprofessional workshops involving UNMDG case studies. Integration of these case studies into the existing curriculum would allow for greater identification with, and acknowledgement of, the United Nation Millennium Development Goals among university students, thereby creating a seed for increased interest, further exploration and potential action to address inequity in important global and local health, social and economic issues.

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