

Learning in the time of COVID-19: Adapting sexual health workforce education to the online environment

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Background/Purpose:

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, most of ASHM's workforce education was delivered face-to-face. Following restrictions on gatherings and travel, ASHM moved to entirely online education, requiring curricula and materials to be adapted to the online environment. ASHM's Sexual Health program adapted two courses: 'STI and BBV Nursing: An Introduction' and 'Sexual Health Update for Primary Care'.

Approach:

Adaptation was informed by the principle that adult learners are relevancy-oriented and self-directed. Working closely with ASHM's Medical Educator, we prioritised key messages within facilitated sessions and provided additional content as self-directed online learning. Interactive elements including quizzes and discussion questions were incorporated throughout to maintain engagement.

Conscious that many learners would be joining from home with family nearby, we provided content warnings prior to displaying images of STIs' clinical presentation.

Outcomes/Impact:

The sexual health program delivered six online courses between May and August. The flexibility of the online environment meant that these courses had greater reach than if they had been delivered face-to-face. One online STI and BBV Nursing course educated over three times more nurses than a typical face-to-face course, and included nurses in rural and remote areas who often have limited access to professional development. Learners have provided overwhelmingly positive feedback on the online format, praising the accessibility, interactivity, engagement and use of technology.

Innovation and Significance:

Delivering sexual health education online allows ASHM to reach more health professionals across a larger geographic region compared to face-to-face education. This is a significant benefit, particularly when the rates of many STIs are increasing while opportunistic screening has reduced due to COVID-19. However, online learning is unable to replicate all of the benefits of face-to-face education, including informal networking. In a post-COVID-19 world, face-to-face education will return; ASHM has an opportunity to ensure online sexual health education remains available alongside it.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.