

Human Rights and Rural Health Providers' Access to Health Information

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Abstract

People in rural areas suffer from common diseases that are easily preventable and curable. Many primary health problems could be prevented and health of rural communities improved if local community based health workers had essential primary health knowledge. Access to essential healthcare information for health workers and users is gaining international recognition as a human right. Recognising access to health information as a human right, IITM's Rural Technology and Business Incubator conceived of a project "First Care" that would provide relevant health information to rural health providers (RHPs) through a distance learning mode. These RHPs are the first point of contact at the village level in India for primary health care. First Care's pilot project was initiated with 22 RHPs in Sivaganga district in Tamil Nadu. Majority of the RHPs (81.80 %) were males and around 68.1 % were above 40 years old. They did not have a formal qualification in any system of medicine but the majority had been practicing independently for the last 15 to 20 years in their respective villages. RHPs were linked with computers and Internet and sent e-learning modules in management of minor illnesses and child growth and nutrition. A pre training knowledge assessment revealed a number of knowledge gaps in RHPs' understanding and awareness. Post training results however showed that the RHPs had made substantial improvements in their knowledge. The range of improvement was from 3.1 to 53.2 per cent. E learning is an effective and feasible strategy for increasing RHPs' access to essential health information.