APPLYING THE CRITERIA FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HEALTH PROMOTION AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS TO AIDS RISK REDUCTION PROGRAMS FOR GAY MEN

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ABSTRACT: As a result of the AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) epidemic, many community health agencies are faced with the task of planning and implementing programs to prevent or reduce the risks of HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infection. Furthermore, the urgency of AIDS will force community groups to develop prevention programs prior to an analysis of substantial data relating to intervention efficacy. By using the five criteria for the development of health promotion and education programs enumerated by the American Public Health Association, planners can benefit from the experience of past health promotion initiatives, and insure a comprehensive approach to planning. The authors describe, using specific examples, how these criteria were used to develop and implement an AIDS risk reduction program for gay and bisexual men.

INTRODUCTION

As a result of the AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) epidemic, many community health agencies are faced with the task of planning and implementing programs to prevent or reduce the risks of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection. Although there is little mystery about the mechanics of HIV transmission, and preventive measures are relatively straightforward, Dr. C. Everett Koop, the surgeon general of the United States Public Health Service, has cautioned
that “educating people about AIDS has never been easy.” In part, his statement refers to the fact that AIDS risk reduction is not uniformly achieved merely by providing information about high risk behaviors. This phenomenon has been observed and documented in gay and bisexual men, currently the single largest “risk group” for HIV infection in America and Europe. Similar phenomena have been observed in other areas of health promotion, namely, that accurate information alone is often inadequate to alter unhealthy behaviors. Although many gay men have modified their sexual behavior in response to the AIDS epidemic, there remains an urgent public health need to develop community based programs that will promote AIDS risk reduction in the group of men who have not adopted safe sexual practices and that will ensure permanent change among those men who have.

In planning AIDS prevention programs, it is prudent to utilize the criteria outlined by the American Public Health Association in collaboration with the Center for Health Promotion and Education of the Centers for Disease Control. Although these 5 criteria were developed to assist planners in evaluating the feasibility of health promotion programs prior to a decision to implement, the issues they raise are also germane to successful program implementation.

These criteria, then in draft form, were used to guide the authors in planning a federally funded, University sponsored, AIDS risk reduction program targeted at gay and bisexual men. Based on our experience with planning and implementing the “AIDS Prevention Project” (APP) we wish to demonstrate how these criteria can be successfully applied to the development of other AIDS risk reduction programs.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

The work group’s definition of health promotion as “a wide variety of individual and community based efforts to encourage or support health,” is certainly an accurate one. To be successfully developed, health promotion programs require the input of a variety of individuals with a broad range of skills. Our own planning process included individuals with expertise in: health promotion theory, health education, attitude assessment, medicine, epidemiology, community health programming, and public relations within the gay community. Without this heterogeneous mix of skills, we believe that we would have been limited in our ability to develop a comprehensive and realistic program.

Involving numerous individuals with expertise in various fields is