



Community Health Workers in Ebola Prevention



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Introduction

Community health workers (CHWs) are essential assets in disease prevention and control. A few months after the sole case of Ebola was reported in Senegal, West Africa, Peace Corps collaborated with partner organizations to provide Ebola and hand washing training to Birkelane CHWs. The training included disease etymology, transmission, prevention and the role of CHWs in Ebola prevention. They also received trainings on hand washing techniques emphasizing the construction and use of the Tippy Tap. The CHWs were then responsible for organizing and implementing causeries within their own neighborhoods.

Background

Birkelane is a large town of approximately 10,000 people in the region of Kaffrine in the central area of Senegal. It is home to a district hospital that serves the 90,000 people in the district. The district has approximately 30 CHWs and Birkelane itself has 12 trained CHWs. By the time Ebola had spread in neighboring countries no educational activities or programs had been initiated in Birkelane to address Ebola identification and prevention. A large gap existed in community member's understanding of the disease; this gap was particularly evident amongst CHWs.

Goals

- Reduce the risks of Ebola transmission in Birkelane
- Community members adopt water and sanitation hygiene practices and behaviors resulting in improved health

Methods

PCV worked with partners to develop a training that encompassed Ebola education, hand washing and behavior change communication.

Ebola training:

- Disease history and presence in West Africa & Senegal
- Symptoms and transmission
- How it is not transmitted
- Differences between Ebola and Malaria
- Prevention
- Roles of a CHW in Ebola prevention

Hand washing training:

- The importance of hand washing
- 5 critical moments for hand washing
- Hand washing demonstrations
- Construction and use of a Tippy Tap



Results

- CHWs showed an overall increase of 14% on their assessment tests. They also reported increased confidence in talking to community members about Ebola.
- 171 individuals were present at a total of 5 causeries (health talks) held by the 10 CHWs.
- 7 of these attendees were men.
- 21 of the households had built the Tippy Tap and reported a total of 133 individuals within those households using the Tippy Tap.
- Children were the most common users within the household.



Discussion

The project proved to be very successful but habitual hand washing remains a challenge. Addressing diseases like Ebola should take a more inclusive approach. Ministries of Health should ensure that CHWs are trained and included in discussions about health education. Organizations should explore providing funding to volunteers who seek to pursue such prevention activities so they can be implemented in a more practical timeframe.