

CD-ROM Review

The Women and Health Learning Package

THE NETWORK: TUFH WOMEN AND HEALTH TASKFORCE (Editors)

The Network: Towards Unity for Health; Global Health through Education, Training and Service (GHETS); Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP); and the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)

E-learning is growing rapidly and is transforming the way people learn. E-learning is frequently used interchangeably with terms such as *online learning*, *virtual learning*, *distributed learning*, *networked learning*, *web-based learning* and also *open and distance learning*. Badrul Khan of George Washington University in Washington, DC, USA defines e-learning as an innovative approach for delivering electronically-mediated, well-designed, learner-centered and interactive learning environments to anyone, anyplace, anytime by utilizing the Internet and digital technologies in concert with instructional design principles.

The Women and Health Learning Package (WHLP) is a free e-learning tool designed to help global communities improve health workers' training in women's health. The WHLP is a dynamic or "living" document that currently consists of five easy-to-read learning modules on the following topics: Adolescent Health; Contraceptive Practices; Gender & Health; Unwanted Pregnancy & Unsafe Abortion; Violence Against Women.

The learning package, using problem-based instructional design, includes instructions for use of the modules, case studies, suggested teaching methods and evaluation/feedback forms. Users are encouraged to adapt the modules to their national and local priorities, to complete and return evaluation forms and to share any modules translated into other languages. The learning package is available online and in CD-ROM format (for institutions unable to download the full learning package from the internet).

The designers/authors of the Learning Package are members of The Network: Towards Unity for Health Women and Health Taskforce. The taskforce brings together leaders in women's health and education from more than 12 countries. The taskforce is committed to high-quality healthcare for women and to integrating women's health and gender issues into medical and health professions education. The Learning Package is targeted for use by educators, health providers and health sciences students worldwide. As professionals who practice in poor and developing communities, the course designers/authors have firsthand knowledge of the need to improve health workers' training in women's health.

The designers/authors of the Learning Package state that their intent is to equip healthcare providers and patients in developing countries with the skills and knowledge necessary to address critical gender-related health issues; to increase the capacity of current and future health professionals to meet the needs of women and their families; and to cultivate leadership skills among women health professionals. The authors' basic premise and the importance of women, children and teens are supported by The United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. While the overarching goal is the elimination of poverty in the world, The Millennium Development Goals commit the international community to focus on seven key areas including three areas targeted at maternal and child health: the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women; the reduction of child mortality and the improvement of maternal care.

The Learning Package is a flexible, learner-centered, and economically feasible tool that emphasizes learning by doing. The Learning Package gets high marks (A+) for its relevance, usefulness, real-time learning emphasis; accessibility, and applicability to global communities. The inclusion of the well-constructed feedback forms for the trainer and learner is significant and will go a long way towards ensuring future success. These forms emphasize two dimensions of effectiveness—customer satisfaction and curriculum quality.

However, the Learning Package does not provide enough support to the trainer/mentor or the self-learner. As currently designed the Learning Package assumes that the trainer who uses these modules has some knowledge of adult learning; instructional experience; personal competencies such as effective communication; and computer skills. It also assumes that the self-learner is motivated and has access to experts with whom they can interact. It also assumes that there are worldwide similarities in educational practices and the worldview of learning. The Learning Package is in English. Since e-learning can require a paradigm shift on the part of both the trainer and learner, the Learning Package and marketing material should make a compelling case for its instructional design and pedagogies and for e-learning. The authors' biggest challenge is to turn English-language training materials into culturally sensitive, intellectually stimulating and appropriate materials for non-English speakers. While the call for interested parties to submit translated documents is a plus, the authors must ensure that there is a careful translation of their work.

What does it take to provide flexible learning environments worldwide? According to e-learning innovators, stories, simulations, goals, practice, fun and failure are the pivotal elements of a successful e-learning system. This Learning Package has the great potential of evolving into a world-class, life-long, learning community or global village with the help of experts and educators from across the globe. The next iteration of the Learning Package should not only expand its content, technologies, and multilingual format but also its ability to evaluate learning effectiveness using dimensions to identify and describe the participants who were the most successful and to determine users'

Reaction, Learning Achievement, Behavior, Results, and Return On Investment.

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Note

The first edition of the WHLP is available for free download at the following site: http://www.the-networktufh.org/publications_resources/trainingmodulesdetail.asp?id=6&t=Training+modules%2FCurricula

Institutions that are unable to download copies of the WHLP may request a free copy on CD-ROM (including free postal shipping) by contacting: GHETS, 8 North Main Street, Suite 404, Attleboro, MA 02703, USA. Tel: +1 508 226 5091 ext. 15. Fax: +1 508 448 8346. E-mail: info@ghets.org