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Effectiveness of mobile phone and internet-based advocacy strategies in increasing awareness and knowledge of common eye diseases among university students

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Purpose: To assess the effectiveness of mobile phone and internet-based advocacy strategies in increasing awareness and knowledge about common eye diseases among university students.

Methods: In this pre-test and post-test experimental study, 484 university students were recruited randomly. Pre-test to assess the awareness and knowledge of common vision impairing conditions (cataract, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma and refractive error) was done with self-administered structured questionnaire. The participants were randomly divided into four groups and intervention (dissemination of advocacy material) was given to three groups via e-mail, short message service (SMS), social networking site (Facebook) and one group was not exposed to any interventions. Post-test was conducted after two weeks with same questionnaire and results were compared.

Results: In the pre-test, there were 484 respondents; 247(49%) male and 247(51%) female. Pretest awareness on cataract was 67.8%, diabetic retinopathy 23.8%, glaucoma 28.3% and refractive error 37%. Knowledge on symptoms and treatment about these diseases was very poor. In the post-test, 409 (response rate, 84.5%) students participated and the awareness and knowledge of diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma had significantly improved ($p < 0.05$) with intervention. Participants receiving advocacy via SMS and social networking sites (Facebook) showed increased awareness and knowledge ($p < 0.01$). Both SMS and social networking site (Facebook) were equally effective.

Conclusion: Awareness and knowledge about common vision impairing eye diseases were poor even among educated young adults. Dissemination of health information through short message service (SMS) and social networking site (Facebook) can be cheap, fast and effective advocacy strategy for them.

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