

Saare County, Estonia



Kuressaare Hospital Meets the Community

Keyword(s):

Health and Family Education

Introduction

The initiative is about raising awareness of medicine, medical aid and possibilities of the hospital in the population of Saare County. This idea was initiated by the fact that many diseases can be traced back to the choices in our lifestyle, e. g. diabetes, hypertension, or in some cases cancer etc. We were looking to shed light on what people can do to lead healthier lives, and that meant having to provide education on how to make better choices in order to live a more balanced and healthy life.

Our motto is: years lived in health. Life expectancy has increased and is increasing, in the light of which, it is important to ask, how many of these years are lived without an illness? It's a pretty small number.

Main challenge

The main challenge was to get people involved and have them attend the lectures. All new things take time, so it was kind of a natural challenge that we faced.

Timing

When a new Chief of Medicine commenced working at the hospital in 2018, the hospital started the initiative and was working towards making the idea a reality.



Objective

The main objective was that people would really start thinking about their health and the hospital saw its role as contributors to that cause and as providers of good advice and techniques as to how to stay healthy and/or improve health.

A somewhat smaller objective of the lecture series was to introduce the educatory possibilities of the hospital to the population. We're also contributing to making Saaremaa a more desired place to live, so that people would want to come and live here seeing that we have a healthy living environment.

Target group

The initiative was/is addressed to the entire community (Saare County). In case of a narrower topic, people with direct contact with it (e. g. cancer) are more prone to attend than those without. In case of broader topics, the audience is also more varied. However, no matter the topic, everyone is welcomed to come and listen. The participation is free of charge.

Geographical range

Saare County.

Stakeholders and partners

Good partners include local non-profit organisations like Saaremaa Chamber of Disabled People, Saaremaa Cancer Association, Saaremaa Rheumatology Association, Saaremaa Diabetes Association. They occasionally contribute to the organisation of lectures and also function as the audience. Likewise, we collaborate with Saare Municipality Government, helping us with communication and thus making us more visible.

Stakeholders were determined in our direct outreach to them. Over time, we have developed a two-way communication, so it's not only us contacting them, but also them proactively contributing to the programme by offering topics to cover and sometimes proposing lecturers.

Strategy / materials

The initiative wasn't backed by any policy initiatives or anything like that. It was a public initiative. However, the municipality government has given recognition for the work several times. For example, Kuressaare Hospital received the Health Contribution Award on country level. Overall, the municipality government has been very supportive.

The initiative was communicated by announcements on local radio and newspaper, posts on Facebook and the hospital's webpage (www.saarehaigla.ee), contacting schools in case of children-oriented lectures, or some other relevant organisations, who can help spread the word to those the lecture addresses the most.

We have created electronic posters, which we post on our platforms. We think green – the less paper the better. It turned out to be a good idea to send out repeated notifications before the lecture day to engage larger crowds.

The initiative doesn't have any limitations as to who can attend. Gender may play a role in some lectures, e. g. a lecture on HPV vaccination is probably more addressed to females. Mostly, our topics can be regarded as general.

Resources

The only financial expense we have foreseen are the transport and accommodation expenses of the lecturer. These are included in our running costs. We have, however, established Kuressaare Hospital Support Fund, which stands separate from the finances of the hospital. In case we have a chance to invite a foreign lecturer to speak in the future and we're talking about larger figures, then our hope is that the Support Fund will agree to cover these expenses. Currently, we manage with very minimal expenses, but we hope that companies that promote healthy lifestyle would begin to support us.

Compliance with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

The strategy definitely aligns with SDG 4 goals, and doubtlessly with SDG 3 goals as well, being that we actively contribute to helping people lead a better informed life when it comes to their health and well-being. Seeing that the lectures are free to all, welcoming all, we promote equity-based lifelong learning and bring people together, thus increasing stronger sense of community as a byproduct of a great opportunity to learn.

Innovation(s)

On country level, the launching of the lecture series was definitely innovative in our objective to popularise medicine in this way that we have, plus it was also free of charge and didn't require any pre-registration. At that time, what can also be considered innovative was that we recorded our lectures, which helped us broaden our reach.

Evaluation

Taking into account that the municipality government has given us recognition multiple times already we might consider our initiative quite successful up to this point. The gratitude of the community is also very much indicative of our success.

Our motto is: years lived in health. Life expectancy has increased and is increasing, in the light of which, it is important to ask, how many of these years are lived without an illness? It's a pretty small number. If the number of years lived in health is starting to increase with positive trends taking ground, then we can truly say that our work has been successful. However, such evaluations may be done perhaps in five years or so, and would also require providing more in-depth courses..

Success parameters

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Impact

The initiative isn't measured quantitatively. The series has allowed participants to come together and enjoy learning interesting and, above all, valuable things about medicine and health. We're moved by the gratitude of our participants, it's a good sign that what we're doing is worthwhile and important to people. We see it as our job to educate the population, and it makes us happy that our lectures have been well-received.

One of the positive outcomes is that people have started to place more trust in the hospital. I'm glad that our hospital's Facebook page has more and more followers, it is a good sign that we've been able to get closer contact with our population, and with the recognition we've received, I think we've contributed to the improvement of citizen's lives.

Impediments

Currently, one of the biggest challenge we face is the effect of COVID-19 as it has turned our plans upside down and the attendance is so low because people are scared to contract the virus on hospital site. In this era of the coronavirus, hospitals make people rather wary and as a result, we've currently lost much of our audience.

We have to decide in the next year, whether we can improve this situation somehow or continue with online lectures only. We're in the process of trying to overcome the challenges we're facing. We must find ways to win back our audience.

Replicability

There are good chances to replicate the initiative. Every hospital is in control of what they're doing. Bigger hospitals have more doctors and specialists they can use as lecturers, smaller ones have to put in effort to find them outside. University hospitals have the best chances of doing this.

Concluding remarks

We educate our community on different health-related topics in order to help them learn about leading a healthier life by giving them the chance to benefit from science-driven knowledge and thus become aware of health risks, diseases and ways we can prevent or cope with illnesses.

Website/Social Media profile(s) of the initiative

The initiative doesn't have its own website nor Facebook profile. It's currently being promoted through other pages like Kuressaare Haigla SA (Kuressaare Hospital Foundation) homepage as well as its Facebook page.

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