

ABSTRACT.

Continuing Education for Health Professionals in Trinidad: An Assessment.

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Continuing professional education is a neglected area in health, but is essential as the health sector undergoes reform in Trinidad and Tobago. The aim of this study was to determine whether the continuing education programmes pursued by health care professionals were adequate to prepare them for achieving the organizational goal of delivering quality health care.

The triangulated methodology entailed a descriptive survey and an evaluative framework. A random stratified sampling method was utilized to select a sample of two hundred and forty-nine (249) health professionals comprising medical officers, nurses and allied health professionals. A self-administered 20-item questionnaire was used to gather data for the survey.

Analysis revealed that generally all health professionals were kept up-to-date through various means. The Ministry of Health training units provided the majority of programmes which mainly addressed issues of professional practice at no cost with no accreditation and were of shorter duration. However, 65% of these were rated as poor.

The concept of quality as customer satisfaction was predominant in determining quality in continuing professional education. The highest-ranking criterion for promoting professional development was stated as programs meeting the training objectives of both organization and individual. The allocation of adequate resources was the key recommendation for improving continuing education.

The evaluation framework provided the microsociological view and revealed that the technocratic model of professional education was implicitly utilized in programme planning. The under macro/over micro type of system planning indicated that the continuing education departments were not fully advancing the goals of the organization.

The status of continuing professional education for health professionals indicated in this study highlighted the incongruence, which exists between the Ministry of Health and its training units. If the goals of Health Sector Reform are to be achieved, then definite changes are required in the training function of the

Ministry, towards preparing health professionals adequately for their new roles and responsibilities.

Keywords: continuing professional education; health professionals; evaluation; quality; professional development.