

Identifying and Empowering Patient Leaders Through Volunteer Training Workshops

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INTRODUCTION & AIM

Over the past two decades, since the inception of the Glivec International Patients Assistance Program (now the Max Access Solutions Program) in The Max Foundation South Asia Region, we have cultivated an exceptional team of volunteers across all our Support Group Arms. However, recognizing the pressing need to expand our volunteer base, especially in cities currently lacking representation for organizing support group gatherings, engaging with patients and raising awareness about new initiatives available in cancer communities, we are committed to taking proactive measures.

The Volunteer Training Workshop aims to identify, enlist, train and empower patient leaders and caregivers with the requisite skill sets. These encompass essential knowledge, attitudes and coping mechanisms to equip them for assuming roles and responsibilities within The Max Foundation's Patient Support Group Arms in the South Asia Region.

METHODOLOGY

In our methodology, we outline our approach to the workshops, detailing the target audience, tactics employed, required resources and evaluation strategy.

Target Group: The primary audience comprises individuals diagnosed with CML, with caregivers playing a significant role in the workshop's target demographic.

Tactics Employed: During the Patient Support Group Meeting (PSGM) sessions, participants are grouped based on the color of their name cards which they are provided when they are registered for the workshop. Each group selects a leader and a presenter. Assigned topics related to training are discussed within these groups. Topics include establishing and maintaining boundaries, required volunteer skills, motivations for volunteering in patient care and ensuring empathetic interactions with patients while refraining from offering medical advice. Each group is given 15 minutes to work through their task and present five key points from their discussions.

Resources Required: Conducting such a workshop requires various resources, including financial support for venue arrangements, materials for presentations and human resources to facilitate group discussions and evaluation.

Evaluation Strategy: The effectiveness of the workshop is evaluated based on the quality of group discussions, the relevance and coherence of presented points and participant engagement and feedback. After the workshops, Impact posters are also created capturing the participants thoughts and key takeaways.

RESULTS

These workshops ignite dynamic discussions around volunteerism and patient care, employing structured group activities to explore key facets including volunteer responsibilities, vital skills, underlying motivations and successful conflict resolution techniques. This introspective journey encourages participants to reflect deeply on their individual roles and responsibilities. As a clear indication of its effectiveness, many participants are inspired and encouraged to engage in volunteering, prompting the formation of committed volunteers and advocates from different parts of the region to form dedicated City Chapter Leaders. Several communication tools like Social Media and WhatsApp groups are used to facilitate continuous interaction and foster collaboration among them.

CONCLUSIONS

Key Learnings and Recommendations:

Engaging and retaining volunteers is an ongoing endeavor critical for organizational and community success. Volunteers serve as indispensable pillars for the fruition and continuity of various initiatives, programs and events. Thus, effective strategies must be in place to identify and retain these invaluable contributors.

During the Volunteer Training Workshops, we see that participants encounter many diverse challenges, each offering profound learning opportunities.

Navigating Limited Volunteer Experience:

Many participants face hurdles due to their lack of prior volunteering experience. Nonetheless, through hands-on activities and collaborative discussions, individuals overcame this barrier, gaining a deeper appreciation for the significance of volunteering.

Addressing Language Barriers:

Language disparities emerged as a notable challenge. To surmount this, sessions are conducted in regional languages, ensuring inclusivity and enabling all participants to actively engage in training activities.

Despite these obstacles, the Volunteer Training Workshops emerge as enriching educational experiences for all involved. Key takeaways include the paramount importance of teamwork, effective communication and empathy in volunteer contexts. Participants also glean insights into the transformative power of community service, recognizing its profound impact on individuals and society at large.

In essence, the Volunteer Training Workshops serve as a platform for participants to not only acquire new skills and knowledge but also to cultivate a deeper appreciation for the intrinsic value of volunteering and its potential to catalyze positive change within the CML community.