

Strengthening Nurses' Capacity in HIV Policy Development in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean: An International Program of Research and Capacity Building

Nancy C. Edwards and Susan Roelofs

A multidisciplinary team of 20 researchers and research users from six countries — Canada, Jamaica, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, and Barbados — are collaborating on a 4-year (2007–11) program of research and capacity building (Edwards et al., 2007), to address the HIV and AIDS pandemic in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, the two regions with the highest global HIV prevalence rates. Nurses are at the forefront of HIV prevention and AIDS care in these countries but have limited involvement in related policy decisions. This initiative uses a participatory action research approach to situate nurses as leaders in building capacity and initiating collaborative action with other health professionals and decision-makers to improve health systems for HIV and AIDS.

Purpose

To strengthen the contribution of Sub-Saharan and Caribbean nurses to health policy development and health systems reform, in order to improve the effectiveness of HIV and AIDS policies and practices.

Objectives

To strengthen health systems in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean by improving the quality of HIV and AIDS nursing care, supporting the scaling-up of innovative HIV and AIDS programs and practices, and fostering dynamic and sustained engagement of nurse researchers and research users in the policy-development process.

Partners

Formal partners include academic researchers, service providers, and nursing-association leaders and their respective institutions in Canada, Jamaica, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, and Barbados. National advisory

committees in partner countries and an international advisory committee will also contribute to program implementation and evaluation.

Research Projects

Project 1: Nursing practice in HIV prevention and AIDS care in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. Project 2: The interface among health-system priorities, capacity building, and policy innovation in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. Project 3: Dynamic collaborations to strengthen health-care systems for HIV and AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. Project 4: International comparative case studies.

Capacity Building

Three leadership hubs in each country will foster dynamic collaboration among frontline nurses and managers, researchers, decision-makers, and community representatives. Hubs will act as levers for change to translate enhanced capacity into policy and action. A 2-month intensive research internship for junior nurse researchers from partner countries will be held annually, building a critical mass of nurse researchers with a leadership role in addressing local health priorities. Interns will collaborate with local decision-makers and with local and Canadian research mentors. Other capacity-building initiatives include knowledge-translation workshops for leadership hubs, focused mentorship activities, and opportunities for graduate student and junior researcher involvement.

Stage

The project commenced in February 2007. The ethics approval process is underway. A team workshop was held in Ottawa in June, attended by representatives from all countries. National advisory committee members have been selected and inaugural meetings began in July. Site visits to Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, hiring of local research staff, and commencement of data collection are planned for the autumn. The first international cohort of research interns will be selected in October 2007 for the June-July 2008 internship in Ottawa. Canadian nurses with an interest in international health may also apply for the internship.

References

- Edwards, N., Kahwa, E., Kaseje, D., Mill, J., Webber, J., & Roelofs, S. (2007). Strengthening health care systems for HIV and AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean: A program of research. *Caribbean Journal of Nursing and Midwifery*, 2, 29-36.

Authors' Note

This project is being carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, on behalf of the Global Health Research Initiative. This synopsis is drawn from the project proposal developed by the full research team.

Comments or queries may be directed to Nancy Edwards, School of Nursing, University of Ottawa, 451 Smyth Road, Ottawa, Ontario K1H 8M5 Canada. Telephone: 613-562-5800, ext. 8395. Fax: 613-562-5658. E-mail: nedwards@uottawa.ca.

Nancy C. Edwards, RN, PhD, is Professor, School of Nursing and Department of Epidemiology and Community Medicine, University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Susan Roelofs, BAH, MA, is Program Manager, Strengthening Nurses' Capacity in HIV Policy Development in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, School of Nursing, University of Ottawa.