

Enhancing Rehabilitation Awareness and Understanding Among Health Professionals in Lao PDR

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ARTICLE INFO

Published on 13th October 2024
Doi:10.54878/9bnkxd37

KEYWORDS

Rehabilitation, Lao PDR, Health Professionals, Knowledge Attitudes and Practices (KAP), Educational Materials

HOW TO CITE

Enhancing Rehabilitation Awareness and Understanding Among Health Professionals In Lao PDR. (2024). *World Congress on Rehabilitation 2024*, 1(1)



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ABSTRACT

Summary In this paper, research conducted in 2022 on understanding the knowledge, attitude, and practices of 247 health professionals on rehabilitation within the healthcare system of Lao PDR is explored, and how educational materials and advocacy tools have been developed to enhance awareness and knowledge on rehabilitation. This aims to support clinicians and managers to increase the integration of rehabilitation in healthcare planning, expand rehabilitation services, and support persons who experience illness, injury, or impairment to optimize functioning and maintain health and wellbeing. **Background and Aim** Lao PDR, with a population exceeding 6.7 million, faces the challenges of non-communicable diseases, road traffic accidents, an aging population, and the persistent threat of Unexploded Ordnances (UxO) from past conflicts. In a resource-constrained setting, addressing the growing demand for quality rehabilitation services is challenging, especially where healthcare providers and managers lack an understanding of rehabilitation and its importance within the healthcare system. The Ministry of Health's National Rehabilitation Strategy (2018-2025) aims to increase awareness among the health workforce about the essential role of rehabilitation in meeting public healthcare needs. **Methods** In 2022, the Ministry of Health conducted its first digital survey on rehabilitation knowledge, attitudes, and practices among 482 health professionals, including clinicians and managers from various levels of the healthcare system in 4 provinces. The survey explored professionals' understanding of rehabilitation definitions, its benefits to population health, delivery platforms, interventions, including assistive products, and the roles of rehabilitation professionals in multidisciplinary teams. **Results** The survey showed that the majority of health professionals acknowledged rehabilitation as vital for reducing disability and improving functioning, especially with the provision of assistive products. However, managers and clinicians viewed rehabilitation as a specific service for persons with disabilities, neglecting its broader healthcare significance to support people with short-term injuries and illnesses leading to limited prioritization of rehabilitation services and its absence in healthcare planning, financing, health and health workforce development. **Conclusion** The survey findings guided the development of educational materials on rehabilitation, which have been shared with healthcare facilities to shift professionals' perspectives in line with the WHO Rehabilitation 2023 Initiative. Communication tools were created to help managers support and advocate for enhanced integration of rehabilitation services into healthcare systems. These initiatives are essential in closing knowledge gaps and promoting rehabilitation as a fundamental component of comprehensive healthcare delivery in Lao PDR.