

Title: Building competence and connection of psychosocial palliative care providers through a virtual community: Project ECHO

Keywords: virtual, community, competency

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Objective: Describe the process of continuous quality improvement to increase connection and competence amongst B.C. psychosocial palliative care providers through a virtual community of practice.

Problem Statement: Through a province-wide survey and a review of education resources in 2019, a need was identified for increased access to education, mentorship and peer support for B.C. psychosocial palliative care providers.

Initiative: The ECHO© model has been implemented internationally and is proven to increase competency and connection through on-line collaboration and mentorship. The BC Centre for Palliative Care, Victoria Hospice and Canuck Place Children's Hospice partnered to conduct a 6-month ECHO proof of concept (Jan-June 2020) with a cohort of 26 psychosocial care providers (Social Workers, Counsellors and Spiritual Health Practitioners).

In addition to increasing competency and connection, aims of the proof of concept were to:

1. Inform planning for future ECHOs
2. Demonstrate positive return on investment for leaders
3. Test the feasibility of a variety of data collection methods
4. Test the uptake of an online forum / Community of Practice
5. Generate new knowledge about a discipline-specific ECHO model

Data collection: Measures of knowledge, competency and integration of new knowledge into practice were gathered at baseline, before and after each session, and at completion of the proof of concept. Rapid PDSA cycles were conducted to improve participants' experience of using an online platform, increase engagement in online discussions and evaluations, and increase the sense of connection.

Results:

- Connection, inter-personal collaboration and individual palliative competency improved significantly
- New evidence-based knowledge was incorporated into practice
- Participants rated the sessions as likely to be perceived as valuable by their supervisor

Implications: The ECHO model was shown to be highly effective to address the challenges reported by psychosocial palliative care providers. The second cohort, with more than double the number of participants, began in Sept 2020 and has incorporated lessons learned from cohort 1. Planning is also underway to deliver ECHO with other groups of clinicians.

