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OP 026

**Forum Theatre Based Community Education to Promote
Recommended First Aid for Poisoning And Snakebite in Rural
Areas - Evidence From Sri Lanka**

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Abstract

Objectives: Appropriate first aid considered as important in acute poisoning and snakebites. Recent research findings from Sri Lanka revealed that rural villagers often use risky first aid practices. Hence promoting recommended first aid in rural communities is important. This study aimed to use community education workshops based on forum theatre - an interactive community theatre - approach to promote recommended first aid practices in rural communities and to assess the effectiveness and acceptability of forum theatre as a community education tool.

Methods: This study was conducted in rural villages of Anuradhapura District of Sri Lanka. Education workshops on first aid for poisoning and snake bites were consisted of forum theatre followed by a formal lecture. Professional artists initiated the forum theatre and the lecture was delivered by a consultant physician. A short questionnaire was used to assess the existing knowledge and first aid practices. Answers for the questionnaire were further discussed during the forum theatre. The lecture was used to clarify the details emerged from forum theatre.

A follow-up survey was conducted after 2 months to assess the changes of knowledge and practices. Focus group discussions and interviews conducted with villagers and health care workers to explore acceptability of forum theatre as an education tool in community level.

Results: Eight community workshops were conducted in village level. Eighty percent of the participants believed that induced vomiting is the best first aid and it was re-emphasized during the forum theatre. There was little knowledge on the risk of aspiration. Villagers believed that emesis helps to take the poison out. The forum theatre was

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used to question these beliefs and the lecture was successful in highlighting risk and promoting correct practice.

Tourniquet was the main first aid used for snakebite according to 55% respondents and their concern was stopping the spread of venom. The risk of tourniquet, immobilization and importance of hospital treatments were highlighted during the forum theatre and the lecture.

Follow-up survey showed an improved ability of participants to distinguish risky and appropriate first aid practices for poisoning and snakebite. Interactive participation was the strength of forum theatre approach and participants highlighted the ability to questions, discuss and learn. Health care workers identified that forum theatre is useful to identify determinants for health issues aiming to design customised educational programs.

Conclusions: Community acceptability of forum theatre as an education tool is high in a rural Sri Lankan district and it also allow researchers to understand existing determinants of health issues. The opportunity for villagers to interactively involve in the discussion and theatre based learning was the highlight. Applicability of this method for areas such as primary prevention of poisoning and snakebites should be further explored.
