Development and feasibility study of a service learning program involving students to support caregivers in Switzerland (PAuSES)

Proches-Aident·e·s : un Service des Étudiant·e·s en Santé

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With the ongoing demographical changes and a persistent shortage of healthcare professionals, informal caregivers of people with chronic health conditions or special needs will face increasing demands for their involvement. Putting up support services for informal caregivers could help prevent burnouts and secondary health problems. To this end, an innovative program involving healthcare students, Proches-Aident·e·s : un Service des Étudiant·e·s en Santé (PAuSES) (A Healthcare Students’ Service for Caregivers) will be developed, tested by the University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland. With this program, students will deliver services to informal caregivers, on a voluntary base, as part of their training. The project will be carried out in three steps: (1) Identification of program components with partners; (2) program development; and (3) feasibility study. At the end of the project, PAuSES will allow future professionals to be more efficient and to have a better understanding of informal caregivers’ situation. Informal caregivers should benefit from a better occupational balance.

INTRODUCTION

As in many other countries, Switzerland faces huge challenges related to epidemiological and demographic changes, parallel to a significant shortage of healthcare workforce. The Federal Council has taken several actions to tackle this situation, including measures to support informal caregivers, which is also an indirect way to respond to a shortage of trained professionals (Conseil Fédéral, 2015).

The implications of close relatives in the support of persons with chronic health conditions or special needs is a current topical issue (Conseil Fédéral, 2014; 2015). Relatives and other informal caregivers are essential components of the present homecare policies put up by municipalities and cantons.

Informal caregivers’ personal experiences are very positive: such as being engaged in very significant occupations but also negative, such as emotional overload, emotional imbalance, physical, emotional, and financial strain, even in the Swiss context (Perrig-Chiello, Hôpflinger et Schnegg, 2010; Perrig-Chiello, Hôpflinger, et Hutchinson, 2011; Pin et al., 2015). Several actions have been undertaken throughout Switzerland, but do not yet meet the increasing needs.

With their specific interpersonal and technical skills, healthcare students could give a valuable support to informal caregivers, complementary to existing professional and voluntary programs.

METHODS

Acknowledging the complexity of caregivers’ needs and determinants of professionals shortage, a multiphase mixed methods design will be used.

Three sequential steps will be implemented. 1) Data gathering and identification of the main components of the program, 2) Program development and; 3) Feasibility study

Based on 20 interviews with key informants and a scoping review, the program will be developed in close relation with professionals and caregivers. A feasibility study will be conducted with 20 caregivers in two cantons. Data will be collected through pre/post interviews, fieldnotes and structured observations.

Analysis will rely on different approaches as described by Miles and Huberman (2003).

PLANNING


IN BRIEF

PAuSES is an innovative program which will provide new forms of support to informal caregivers, customised to their actual and evolving needs. It will provide students with solid professional and interprofessional skills, rooted in their personal experience, to support efficient and effective collaboration with informal caregivers. At the end of the feasibility study, PAuSES should be integrated in the ordinary curriculum of the Faculty of Health at University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland, which provide education and research for seven health professions (Midwifery, Osteopathy, Nursing, Physiotherapy, Nutrition and Dietetics, Radiologic Medical Imaging Technology and Occupational Therapy).

SELECTED REFERENCES


Other 9

Table 1. Services that would be chosen by students.

Online study conducted in 2016 with 250 students from the HES-SO

Aim

By the mean of a service learning program :

1) To improve informal caregivers’ quality of life, especially their occupational balance

2) To improve future professionals’ efficiency in collaborating with informal caregivers

Type of services

n

Shared social and leisure activities

219

Assistance in personal care and activities of daily living

179

Presence at home for a short period of time

169

Surveillance and supervision

166

Outside home services

155

Information seeking

145

Other

9

Chart 1. Availability of students by weeks, according to reward

Online study conducted in 2016 with 250 students from the HES-SO