

Mobile Health Applications & the Health Promotion Workforce

A survey, by HPF intern Ancy Paul, has revealed that more than half the health promotion workforce use M-health – a health information programme for smart devices.

Ancy completed her internship at HPF in June 2015. While at the Forum she wished to explore the use of health applications by the health promotion workforce and the potential use of an app that would support health promotion practice.

It is hoped that these findings will be useful in informing and future health promotion apps being developed for the health promotion workforce.

Participants

The majority of respondents (37.2%) were aged 50-60 years.

25% were in the 40-50 year age bracket, 13.41% were in the 30-40 year group, while 12.8% were over 60 years old.

89.6% of respondents were female.

Findings:

The survey findings revealed that more than half of the health promotion workforce use M-health – which is a health information programme for smart devices such as mobile phones, I pads and laptops. Approximately 58.54% of the respondents used a mobile health application.

Sixty-eight (or 41.46%) did not. Of these 73.8% said they did not know how to use a M-health application. Three felt that they were a waste of time and the rest either did not have access or did not trust the information provided by the app.

What type of health application do you use?

Of those who use a M-health app, the majority (72.5%) used exercise and wellbeing applications, the next prominent use was the provision of medical information. Others answers included information on hobbies, smoking cessation, reproductive and sexual health and mental health. A small number used nutrition and food apps and problem gambling sites.

When asked who they used the app for, the majority of respondents (83.9%) used the M-health app for themselves, 38% used it for their health promotion activities, 33.6% used it for family and 25.6% used it for community.

When asked how a mobile health app could be useful for their work participants highlighted:

- Explore online resources – 85.7%
- Searching for health promotion organisations – 67%
- Searching for online training opportunities – 64%
- Find examples of health research projects – 62%

- Searching for health promotion research projects – 45%

Respondents illustrated the advantages of using mobile apps

- Flexible and handy to use.
- Rapid information gathering
- Quick and easy access to websites.
- Team work and collaboration
- Data sharing across geographical locations
- Helps to improve the productivity of the workforce through social networking.
- Easily downloaded from Apple store or Google Play store.
- A motivating tool in health communication and health promotion

Respondents also illustrated some disadvantages of mobile apps

- The reviews written about the app can be manipulated.
- The customer ratings given can be bogus.
- Massive amount of data cannot be gathered at a short time period from a mobile app.
- The medical information provided can be misleading and may lead to a wrong diagnosis.
- There can be mechanical errors in health and fitness applications.
- It can only be accessed with a smartphone or tablets.