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Acceptability, impact and sustainability of the national pilot quality assurance system for self management programs

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Chronic condition self-management education and training interventions such as the Stanford Self Management Programs (SMP) have the capacity to improve health and quality of life of people with chronic conditions whilst reducing the use of health services. This is in line with the outcomes from the recent Council of Australian Governments’ meeting where it was indicated that self-management will be a centrepiece in forthcoming chronic disease initiatives.

Aim: report on a large national pilot quality assurance program involving the implementation and of an evaluation and quality monitoring system for SMPs including the provision of structured feedback to courses, course leaders, and the service providers.

During 2005/06 the quality assurance program was implemented at 11 diverse organisations across Australia. The program involved assisting organisations to apply the 42-item Health Education Impact Questionnaire (HEI-Q), a chronic disease health education outcome measure, and then observe and evaluate the value and impact of the quality program. Interviews with course leaders (n=60) and course participants (n=35) have elicited views about course quality and feedback processes.

Results: The evaluation revealed enablers and barriers to effective implementation and sustainability. Important enablers were:

- Course Leaders and organisations valued an Australia-wide system that provided feedback on course quality and the impact on participants.
- Course Leaders were strongly personally motivated to respond appropriately to HEI-Q course report feedback.
- Completing the questionnaire provided participants with the opportunity to reflect on issues that emerge in the course content and reflect on their progression at the end of the SSMP.

Sustainability issues included:

- Organisations and course leaders require support, training and flexibility on how to administer and manage the use of the HEI-Q.
- Availability of administrative resources in organisations to support the quality assurance activities.
- The requirement that course leaders are trained in interpreting HEI-Q course report data.

A quality improvement framework was developed which identified the actions required of key stakeholders to support effective implementation.

Discussion: With the increasing endorsement of SMP across sectors it is important that course quality is known, is acceptable, and is communicated to stakeholders to inform and engender confidence in the SSMP. To effectively implement and sustain a quality improvement program for SMP, the processes and tools for measuring outcomes need to be responsive, flexible and easily integrated into the organisation and delivery of programs.