
NOTIZIARIO

Education in Agricultural Health

INTRODUCTION

More than one third of the world's labour force is employed in agriculture, which is one of the most hazardous of all sectors and many agricultural workers suffer occupational accidents and ill health (5). In several parts of the world educational activities are developed, executed and evaluated (3) in order to protect the health and safety of agricultural workers. In September 2015 an international congress on Rural Health in Lodi, Italy, devoted a session¹ to Education in Basic Occupational Health. The aims of this session were (1) exchange of recent experiences, and (2) discussion of potential future activities including the feasibility of an educational network. Nine lectures, mentioned in the Appendix, were presented by experts from several countries and by representatives of ICOH, EU, ILO and WONCA².

EDUCATION PRIMARILY FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

The famous 5 day-course, developed in Iowa (USA) from 1974 on by Donham and colleagues (4) with well-understood support from the agricultural industry and farmers' as-

sociations, gradually spread in adapted form to various states in the USA, to Australia and Turkey (12). As an experiment the team offered a course in which one day was replaced by online education. The multidisciplinary background of the participants is appreciated as a means for additional learning, e.g. from agricultural engineers; this aspect was confirmed by other educators present at the meeting. Also supported was the intention to develop a core course (in fact a course core), as this could foster the international application of training programs that cover the most relevant themes.

Access to good online education materials such as lessons, modules and courses is offered by the website www.workershealtheducation.org (14). Relevant information on the Internet is provided also by PubMed/Medline for medical information (11) [specific agriculture filters support searching (9)], by the Cochrane Library (2) for authoritative reviews, by a Canadian site (1) offering person-to-person advices and e-lessons, and by other websites. Development of an online platform for exchange of experiences as a part of www.workershealtheducation.org or with similar facilities was recommended.

An initiative was presented to train trainers in low income countries to deliver a concise course Basic Occupational Health in Agriculture to primary health care profes-

¹The congress was organized by the International Centre for Rural Health and the Department of Health Sciences of the University of Milan (Head Claudio Colosio); the session was chaired by Gert van der Laan and Frank van Dijk.

²ICOH, International Commission on Occupational Health; ILO, International Labor Organization; WONCA, World Organization of National Colleges, Academies and Academic Associations of General Practitioners/Family Physicians.

sionals. The course should give due attention to diagnosis, treatment and prevention of occupational diseases and to counseling of workers with a medical problem in return to work. Another focus would be keeping oneself well informed, e.g. by using online information. In this context the authors mention that recently WONCA and ICOH jointly pledged: '.... to address the gaps in services, research, and policies for the health and safety of workers and to better integrate occupational health in the primary care setting, to the benefit of all workers and their families (13).

EDUCATION PRIMARILY FOR AGRICULTURAL PROFESSIONALS

In Sweden, education in Health and Safety (H&S) is now recognized as essential in the training for Agricultural Business and Management. Paying for a course can be unacceptable for farmers. Experiences in Italy show that H&S training for farmers and farm workers should be adapted to their specific branch of agriculture e.g. winery, olive oil or meat production, dairy, and have sufficient practical elements, e.g. simulation of first aid and emergency measures.

ILO introduced the successful program 'Work Improvement in Neighborhood Development' (WIND), executed e.g. in Vietnam, China, South Korea, Senegal, and Eastern European countries (7). Farmers are trained to use the WIND questionnaire in exploring risks and finding solutions with their colleagues. Principles are: participation, simple low-costs solutions, learning from local examples, follow-up of plans (8). The illustrated ILO Ergonomic checklist for agriculture (10) is now available in abbreviated version as an app for smartphone (6).

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

The participants were willing to share teaching experiences, e.g. on the efficacy and appreciation of a specific course design, and on the feasibility of methods to evaluate the learning process. Several participants expressed their preparedness to share or jointly develop educational materials: visual presentations, case-based lessons, motivating examples of solutions for a problem, tasks to assess work-site hazards, and methods how to incorporate training-by-peers. A joint initiative could be the development of a short blended core course for primary health care professionals, supporting the delivery of essential occupational health interventions in developing economies. Subsidies are needed for these activities.

In conclusion, there is a great need for educating many groups at various levels to improve working conditions, safe behavior and health care in the diverse agricultural branches.

There is a great willingness to cooperate in order to expand teaching activities and to improve teaching quality.

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14. www.workershealtheducation.org (last accessed 26-11-2015)

Appendix: Presenters in the session on education in agricultural health (Lodi Congress, 2015)

Susan Brumby, National Centre for Farmers Health, Deakin University, Australia. *Experiences with training courses; lessons learnt.*

Margherita Guzzoni, Education Department of the Italian Association of Workplace Safety Trainers (AiFOS), Italy. *Growing safety for workers and consumers. A model for training and education in agriculture.*

Risto Rautiainen, Nebraska University, USA. *Experiences with training courses; lessons learnt.*

Peter Lundqvist, University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden. *Experiences with training courses; lessons learnt.*

Claudio Colosio, Department of Health Sciences of the University of Milan and International Centre for Rural Health, Italy. *Experiences from the international Centre of Rural Health.*

Frank van Dijk, Foundation Learning and Developing Occupational Health (LDOH), The Netherlands. *Safe and healthy work in agriculture: online information and education.*

Maarten Verberk, Foundation Learning and Developing Occupational Health (LDOH), The Netherlands. *Development of a training program.*

Tanja Perez-Pavliško, Croatia, EURIPA (European Rural and Isolated Practitioners Association) and WONCA (World Association of family physicians). *On training book Rural health.*

Jorge Costa-David, European Commission, Directorate General Employment, Luxemburg. *The EU opinion and recommendations.*

Shengli Niu, International labour Organisation (ILO), Geneva. *About WIND-approach.*
