

The role and utilisation of public health evaluations in Europe: a case study of national hand hygiene campaigns

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Background

Evaluations are essential to judge the success of public health programmes. In Europe, the proportion of public health programmes that undergo evaluation remains unclear. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control sought to determine the frequency of evaluations amongst European national public health programmes by using national hand hygiene campaigns as an example of intervention.

Methods

A cohort of all national hand hygiene campaigns initiated between 2000 and 2012 was utilised for the analysis. The aim was to collect information about evaluations of hand hygiene campaigns and their frequency. The survey was sent to nominated contact points for healthcare-associated infection surveillance in European Union and European Economic Area Member States.

Results

Thirty-six hand hygiene campaigns in 20 countries were performed between 2000 and 2012. Of these, 50% had undergone an evaluation and 55% of those utilised the WHO hand hygiene intervention self-assessment tool. Evaluations utilised a variety of methodologies and indicators in assessing changes in hand hygiene behaviours pre and post intervention. Of the 50% of campaigns that were not evaluated, two thirds reported that both human and financial resource constraints posed significant barriers for the evaluation.

Conclusion

The study identified an upward trend in the number of hand hygiene campaigns implemented in Europe. It is likely that the availability of the internationally-accepted evaluation methodology developed by the WHO contributed to the evaluation of more hand hygiene campaigns in Europe. Despite this rise, hand hygiene campaigns appear to be under-evaluated. The development of simple, programme-specific, standardised guidelines, evaluation indicators and other evidence-based public health materials could help promote evaluations across all areas of public health.