

Family Health History – A Model for Increasing Behaviour Change

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To increase awareness amongst the community of family health history to provide a cue to action for modifying behaviour that will reduce the risk of common chronic diseases.

A pilot project was undertaken in a Perth suburb in 2008 to gauge community interest in family health history and determine if awareness of family health history and potential increased risk of common chronic diseases resulted in behaviour change. Family health history represents a largely non-modifiable risk factor and applying the Protection Motivation Theory may prove useful to ensure that the information obtained from a family health history results in attendant behaviour change.

One hundred and thirty-three people over the age of 18 years attended seminars on family health history during the pilot project; the majority of attendees were women.

The perceived importance of family history replicated the results of international studies with 85% of attendees responding that family history was “very important” (25% response rate). Despite the perceived importance of family health history, few respondents had actively collected their family history. All respondents (except community health nurses) stated that if they became aware of a family health history that indicated increased risk of a chronic disease they would be ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ likely to modify their behaviour.

Family health history can be used to indicate an increased risk of common chronic disease but represents a significant challenge for implementation of large scales programs aimed at modifying behaviours to reduce their risk.