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Vaccination campaign against COVID-19 in Ukraine: Current Problems of State Educational Policy and Outreach Work of Higher Medical Educational Institutions

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Marija Hutsol *
Olha Tatarina **
Olena Titkova ***
Anatolija Krasnova ****
Halyna Stechak *****

Abstract

The study is dedicated to the coverage of the peculiarities of the organization of the vaccination campaign against COVID-19 in Ukraine, all this, to analyze the achievements and current problems of the outreach work of medical institutions of higher education. This paper is an independent scientific research review with an analysis of the questionnaire data on the problematic issue. The study was based on the application of a series of theoretical and empirical methods: analysis, systematization and generalization of data on the search for the characteristics of the organization of dissemination work in higher medical education institutions; questionnaire survey to the participants of the educational process. The survey involved 250 respondents from the aforementioned medical HEIs. The results established the awareness of the participants and also testified to the feasibility and importance of strengthening outreach activities in the selected higher medical education institutions. We conclude that consistent disclosure about the risks, uncertainties and availability of vaccines fosters public confidence in vaccination.

* Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor of Linguistics of Ivano-Frankivsk National Medical University, 76018, Ivano-Frankivsk, Halytska Str. 2. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8970-8835>

** Doctor Philosophy of Medical Science Assistant Professor of the Department of Orthopedic National Pirogov Memorial Medical University, Vinnytsya 56 Pirogov Street, Vinnytsya, 21018, Ukraine. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6921-3624>

*** Candidate of Medical Sciences (PhD), Associate Professor Department of Pediatrics №2 Odessa National Medical University. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8697-0950>

**** Candidate of Medical Sciences docent Uzhhorod national university, Faculty of medicine, Department of Faculty Therapy 88000, Ukraine, Transcarpathian region, Uzhhorod, Narodna Square, No. 3. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6858-4549>

***** Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences associate professor, Department of Ukrainian Studies Danylo Halytsky Lviv National Medical University 79010 Lviv, 69 Pekarska str. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7112-3409>

Keywords: vaccination campaign; disclosure; institutions of higher medical education; national security; pandemic threats.

Campana de vacunaci3n contra el COVID-19 en Ucrania: Problemas actuales de la pol3tica educativa estatal y de la labor de divulgaci3n de las instituciones de ense1anza m3dica superior

Resumen

El estudio est1 dedicado a la cobertura de las peculiaridades de la organizaci3n de la campana de vacunaci3n contra el COVID-19 en Ucrania, todo ello, para analizar los logros y problemas actuales de la labor de divulgaci3n de las instituciones m3dicas de ense1anza superior. Este trabajo es una revisi3n de investigaciones cient3ficas independientes con un an1lisis de los datos del cuestionario sobre la cuesti3n problem1tica. El estudio se bas3 en la aplicaci3n de una serie de m3todos te3ricos y emp3ricos: an1lisis, sistematizaci3n y generalizaci3n de los datos sobre la b3squeda de las caracter3sticas de la organizaci3n del trabajo de divulgaci3n en las instituciones de educaci3n m3dica superior; encuesta por cuestionario a los participantes del proceso educativo. En la encuesta participaron 250 encuestados de las mencionadas IES de medicina. En los resultados se estableci3 la concienciaci3n de los participantes y adem1s se atestigu3 la viabilidad e importancia de reforzar las actividades de divulgaci3n en las instituciones de educaci3n m3dica superior seleccionadas. Se concluye que una divulgaci3n coherente sobre los riesgos, las incertidumbres y la disponibilidad de las vacunas fomenta la confianza del p3blico en la vacunaci3n.

Palabras clave: campana de vacunaci3n; divulgaci3n; instituciones de ense1anza m3dica superior; seguridad nacional; amenazas pand3micas.

Introduction

Vaccination is one of the safest and most effective methods of protection against many infectious diseases. According to World Health Organization (WHO) experts, increasing global awareness of the importance of vaccination can save a significant number of lives. The COVID-19 pandemic has repeatedly increased the importance of immunization for both individual and collective protection (Chertakova *et al.*, 2020).

In recent years, however, there has been a decline in the rate of immunization worldwide. This is why the vaccine campaign against Covid-19 has faced several challenges. To date, domestic and foreign medical scientists have noted that mistrust of vaccination has hindered the expansion of immunization coverage and have suggested strategies to address this problem.

The concept of “mistrust of vaccination” has entered medical practice (Yakovenko, 2020: 72–77), which has been defined as situations where people either delay or refuse immunization despite the availability of services. The problem is complex and context-specific. Its nature may vary according to time, place, and specific vaccine type. Factors such as indecision, uncertainty about the vaccine, irresponsibility, and mistrust can have an impact. In addition, the most important factor in refusal to immunize can be considered a lack of public awareness of the importance of vaccination in the fight against COVID-19 (Zakharchenko, *et al.*, 2022).

As the experience with COVID-19 has shown (Syamila *et al.*, 2021), all structures of the state must cooperate in the fight against infectious diseases. A special place in outreach belongs to medical institutions: institutions of medical care as well as institutions of higher medical education, which are called upon to actively inform the population about the benefits of vaccination and the risks associated with refusal to vaccinate. And the best way to address the problem of vaccine hesitancy is through awareness-raising activities that are democratic and based on full respect for human rights (Pidyukov *et al.*, 2021).

Consequently, the purpose of the article is determined by highlighting the peculiarities of the organization of the vaccination campaign against COVID-19 in Ukraine and analysis of modern achievements and problems of awareness-raising work of medical institutions of higher education.

1. Material and methods

The above goals and objectives of the study determine the use of such theoretical and empirical methods as: analysis, systematization, and synthesis of data to identify the features of the organization of outreach work in institutions of higher medical education; questioning the participants of the educational process to identify the level of awareness of the peculiarities of the organization of vaccination campaigns.

The study was conducted during 2021 at the Department of Linguistics of the Faculty of Foreign Citizenship Training of the Ivano-Frankivsk National Medical University and the Department of Faculty Therapy of the Faculty of Medicine of the Uzhhorod National Medical University. The

study involved 250 respondents of these medical HEIs. A number of works by leading domestic and foreign scientists have been devoted to the study of the phenomenon of population vaccination (Kozlovskiy *et al.*, 2021), which analyzed the fundamental principles of this process (Kaliuzhnaia *et al.*, 2018), noted the feasibility of using mass vaccination when spreading infectious diseases in education (Orenstein and Ahmed, 2017); emphasized the importance of educational work among the population on the importance of mass vaccination (Mollarasouli *et al.*, 2022).

However, these diverse studies did not cover all aspects of the functioning of vaccination campaigns, and the factual data obtained from numerous questionnaires concerned mainly subjective public opinion, skepticism about the role of information resources in health issues, lack of necessary knowledge about vaccination, etc. Thus, the scientific novelty of the article lies in a multifaceted and at the same time comprehensive and holistic consideration of the role of outreach activities of medical HEIs during the vaccination campaign against COVID-19.

2. Results

Conducting mass vaccination campaigns as part of prevention or in response to disease outbreaks that have widespread consequences is one effective measure to prevent the spread of disease and reduce mortality rates. However, due to the need for physical distance to reduce the spread of COVID-19, many countries have decided to postpone such campaigns. Therefore, choosing the optimal strategy for outreach work in the countries of the world and Ukraine, in particular, has experienced certain difficulties.

The challenge during such work was to balance the benefits of safe and effective anti-epidemic measures against the risk of increasing the rate of spread of the new infection, which could affect the system of basic health care delivery. In considering this question, one must first rely on a detailed examination of epidemiological data (Supriyadi, 2021). In a prolonged COVID-19 pandemic, providing the necessary knowledge to counteract the spread of coronavirus disease is an essential element in the phase of organizing a vaccination campaign. At the same time, even though the topic of vaccination is relevant and topical, there is resistance from the population.

Thus, the source of necessary, above all, reliable and scientifically sound information for the population should be a medical professional or a medical educator. Since the implementation of the vaccination campaign is based on the operation, dissemination, and recording of a significant amount of information, the place and role of employees of institutions of higher medical education change significantly - a great responsibility is imposed.

In addition to performing their professional duties, the scientific and pedagogical staff of medical HEIs becomes not only a transmitter of certain information, but also a source of information, trust, and persuasion. By engaging in the organization of the vaccination campaign, scientific and pedagogical employees of medical HEIs take on the responsibility of informing the population about the vaccination process as a social phenomenon, the involvement of resources, the choice of vaccine, possible reactions, etc. Proper public awareness, data analysis, and monitoring become essential for building a competent outreach effort on the need for vaccination against COVID-19.

In this regard, the logical and quality organization of the databases at all levels of the vaccination program requires significant attention, in particular, and with all the necessary requirements to protect the confidentiality and reliability of the information disseminated. Inaccurate, falsified, or unverified information provided to the public could jeopardize the implementation of the vaccine campaign as a whole and negatively impact the process of establishing the evidence base for adult immunization.

Therefore, one should proceed with caution and consider all possible risks (Mollarasouli *et al.*, 2022). Errors and inaccuracies in outreach work can lead to negative consequences. Hence, the development and step-by-step implementation of reliable channels of communication and information transfer between all participants of the process by medical HEIs is of paramount importance.

According to the above, to organize a quality vaccination campaign against COVID-19, outreach activities should be implemented in stages. The main stages include the following (Rommel, 2021):

- Conducting an assessment of the possible consequences of an outbreak according to basic epidemiological criteria.
- An analysis of the possible benefits of a mass vaccination campaign and an assessment of the country's capacity to implement the process safely and effectively (Iacobucci, 2021a).
- Consideration of the possible risks associated with the intensified spread of COVID-19 as a result of a mass vaccination campaign.
- Selection of optimal algorithms of actions according to the epidemic situation with the spread of COVID-19.
- Analysis and consideration of best practices in Europe and the world.

The step-by-step development of vaccination outreach activities confirms the importance of the role of scientific and pedagogical employees of medical HEIs in improving the effectiveness of the organization of the

vaccination campaign against COVID-19 (Iacobucci, 2021b), which is also determined by their performance of certain functions (Fig.1).

Taking into account the new functions of scientific and pedagogical employees of medical HEIs, it was decided to conduct a pilot study to find out the level of their influence on society and the expediency and necessity of outreach activities by them (Komykh and Nedria, 2022).

Before the start of COVID-19 vaccination outreach work, a questionnaire survey was conducted among employees of several institutions of higher medical education. A total of 250 respondents participated in the survey and were asked several questions on their understanding of the importance of COVID-19 vaccination.

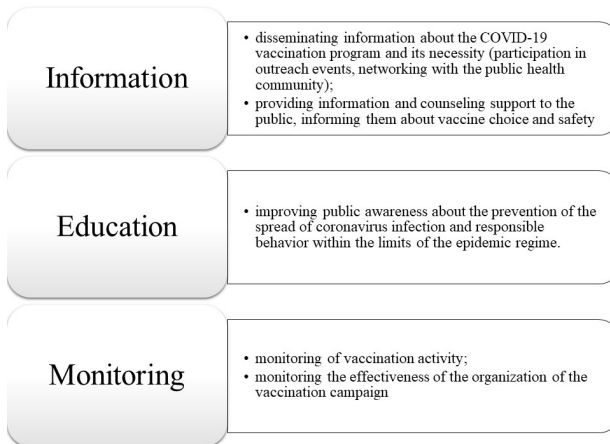


Fig. 1. Functions of medical HEIs educators in the organization of COVID-19 vaccination campaign outreach activities.

Source: author's development.

Survey participants were asked to express their opinions on the criteria of “very important,” “important enough,” and “not important.” So, the results showed that 70 respondents considered COVID-19 vaccination as very important and necessary, 120 as important enough, and 70 as unimportant. These surveys are shown in the chart (Fig. 2).

Awareness of the importance of vaccination for outreach activities

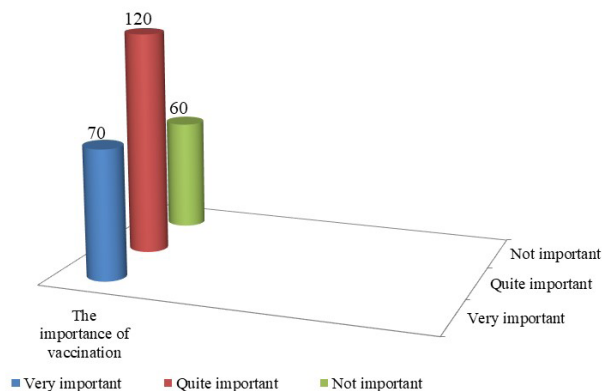


Fig. 2. Vaccination Awareness to Awareness Raising Data.

Source: author's development.

Awareness of the importance and necessity of vaccination is complex when all channels of receiving data on this process are involved. So, the survey participants were asked a number of questions about awareness of vaccination issues and their possession of certain information on this issue. Respondents were asked to evaluate the level of satisfaction with the informational work of the HEIs on vaccination, the level of awareness of vaccination, and the level of sufficiency of the vaccination material.

The evaluation criteria were “very good”, “good enough” and “not good enough”. So, the results of the survey were distributed as follows: very good satisfaction with the information work of the HEIs was evaluated by 84 participants, fairly good by 114, and not good enough by 52. Very good awareness of vaccination issues was evaluated by 71 respondents, good - by 124 and not good enough - by 55. 60 participants evaluated the materials on vaccination issues as “excellent”, 118 participants as “good” and 72 as “not good enough”. These surveys are shown in the chart (Fig.3).

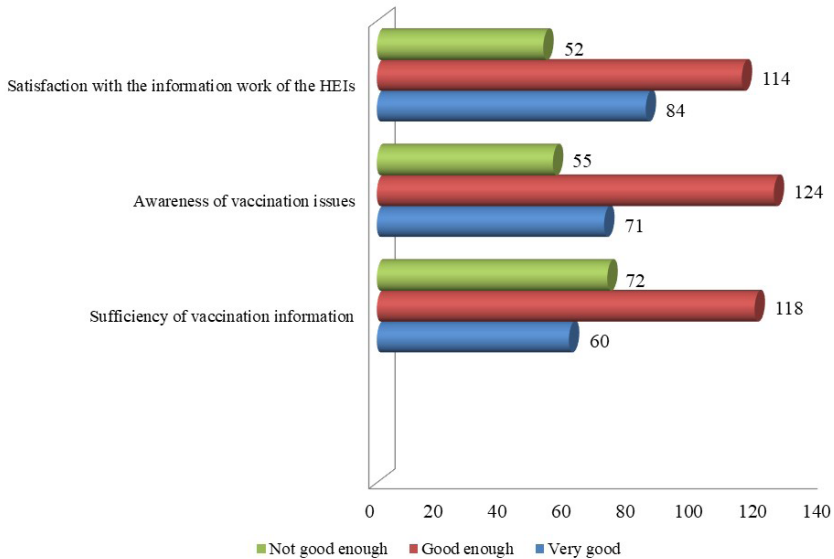


Fig. 3. Data on evaluation of certain moments of COVID-19 vaccination prior to outreach activities.

Source: author's development.

The results of the surveys conducted revealed low awareness among participants and showed the need to strengthen and improve outreach efforts at selected medical higher education institutions.

More than 120 informational messages of thematic nature (types of vaccines, positive effect of vaccination, consequences of refusal from vaccination, etc.) were placed on the websites of selected medical HEAs, more than 80 reminders about the benefits of vaccination, formation, and stability of immune protection developing after administration of various types of vaccines against COVID-19 available in Ukraine were placed.

Presentations were organized by leading HEIs experts to promote knowledge about the COVID-19 vaccine campaign. Data from selected studies conducted around the world on post-vaccine immunity were presented in an accessible form.

Roundtables, webinars, and meetings of scientific circles were held to which different segments of the population were invited.

In addition, students from the named medical schools also joined the work and actively participated in health education work among the

population on vaccination to improve knowledge and literacy of the population about diseases, types of vaccines, complications in case of non-vaccination, etc.

After a series of COVID-19 vaccination outreach activities, a follow-up survey and questionnaire were administered to participants. The questions on the questionnaires remained the same. The response parameters were the same.

So, the results showed that after a series of COVID-19 vaccination outreach activities, 100 respondents considered COVID-19 vaccination very important and necessary, 130 respondents considered it important enough, and 20 respondents considered it unimportant. These surveys are shown in the chart (Fig. 4).

Awareness of the importance of vaccination after outreach activities

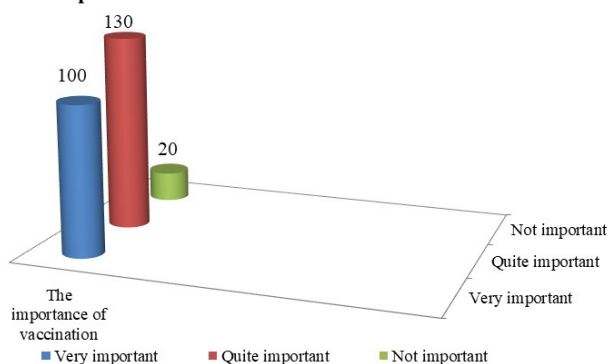


Fig.4. Data on vaccination awareness after outreach activities.

Source: author's development.

The results of the survey assessing the outstanding points of the vaccination campaign were distributed as follows: very good satisfaction with the information work of the HEIs was assessed by 101 participants, “good enough” - 119 and “not good enough” - 30. Very good awareness of vaccination issues was shown by 91 respondents, “good” - 29. The sufficiency of vaccination materials was rated as “excellent” by 84 participants, as “good” by 140, and as “insufficient” by 26. These surveys are shown in the chart (Fig. 5).

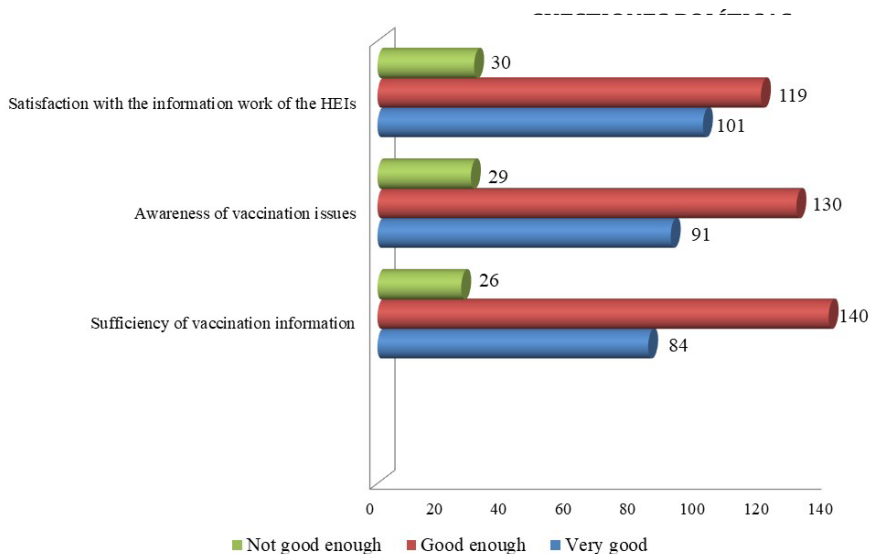


Fig. 5. Data on evaluation of certain moments of COVID-19 vaccination prior to outreach activities.

Source: author's development.

The results of the surveys found increased awareness among participants and demonstrated the feasibility and importance of strengthening and improving outreach efforts at selected institutions of higher medical education.

3. Discussion

When analyzing the calligraphic aspects of the impact of vaccination outreach measures, subjective aspects should not be excluded as well. It should be noted that there is no universal strategy that could be an effective mechanism and guarantee 100% readiness for vaccination. Subjective factors include public mistrust of the vaccination process (Schaefer *et al.*, 2021). Distrust of vaccination may be a consequence of doubts about the safety of vaccines, but it is only one of the underlying factors (Mahase, 2021).

A number of factors can lead to distrust of vaccination, such as: negative beliefs based on myths, e.g., that vaccination leads to infertility in women; misinformation; distrust of professionals or the health care system; the influence of authority figures, etc. (Mahase, 2019). The magnitude of the problems and the specific conditions may be different, but they must be taken into account when planning and implementing public awareness and

vaccination activities. Therefore, it is essential to effectively develop and establish channels of communication with the population.

Conclusion

The main barriers to developing a positive attitude toward the vaccination process are fear of the risks of complications, dissatisfaction with the quantity and quality of information about vaccinations, uncertainty about vaccine effectiveness, and underestimation of the severity of the possible course of the disease. Overcoming these barriers is one of the most important professional tasks assigned to health care providers today. Consistent, transparent, meaningful, and proactive outreach on risks, uncertainties, and vaccine availability will build public trust in vaccination.

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