



GSJ: Volume 11, Issue 12, December 2023, Online: ISSN 2320-9186
www.globalscientificjournal.com

Title: Community service at a medical college: a staff member experience and students' impact

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Abstract:

This article describes community service activities by a radiology professor and students to provide free medical services to employees and workers at a university. The experience was conducted over a period of about ten years and included basic medical services such as blood pressure checks, ultrasounds of the neck, and referrals to other medical providers when necessary. The project also involved social activities such as parties, meals, and clothes to the employees and workers. The activities were well-received by the university community and were an example of how an academic person can encourage his students to make a difference in the lives of others.

Key words:

Community services, volunteer, students, staff members, university

Introduction and aim of work:

Community service volunteering is the act of giving one's time and skills to help others in the community without financial compensation. It is a valuable experience for people of all ages, but it can be especially beneficial for university students.

Volunteering can help students to develop a variety of skills, including leadership, teamwork, communication, and problem-solving. It can also help them to learn about different cultures and perspectives, and to develop a sense of civic responsibility.

In addition, volunteering can provide students with opportunities to network with professionals in their field and to gain valuable work experience. This can be helpful when they are ready to start their careers.

There is a growing body of research on the benefits of community service volunteering for university students. Some of the key benefits include:

- Academic achievement: Studies have shown that students who volunteer tend to have higher GPAs and are more likely to graduate on time.
- Personal development: Volunteering can help students to develop a variety of personal skills, such as leadership, teamwork, communication, and problem-solving. It can also help them to learn about different cultures and perspectives, and to develop a sense of civic responsibility.

- Career development: Volunteering can provide students with opportunities to network with professionals in their field and to gain valuable work experience. This can be helpful when they are ready to start their careers.

There is a growing body of research on the benefits of community services for university students. For example, a study by Meyer, Neumayr, and Rameder (2019) found that students who engaged in CSV had higher levels of self-efficacy, self-determination, and civic engagement[1]. Additionally, a study by Snyder and Omoto (2008) found that community services experiences were associated with increased personal development, improved self-esteem, and enhanced interpersonal skills[2].

Community services and volunteering can also help students develop professional competencies. For example, a study by Goodman and Tredway (2016) found that community services experiences helped students develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills[3]. Additionally, a study by Taylor and Pancer (2007) found that community services experiences helped students develop leadership skills and teamwork skills[4].

Structural challenges within countries may provide a better explanation of variation in student motivation towards volunteering, than cross-cultural variation in attitudes towards volunteering between countries[5].

In addition to the benefits for students, community services also benefit the community. Community services include a lot of tracks like financial aid, healthcare, education, and many others.

In the time being, community services are on the top priorities of all Saudi Arabia universities. King Abdulaziz University is concerned with being globally distinguished by sustainability and community partnership. It spreads the culture of social service, community responsibility, training, and rehabilitation through various programs, courses, and activities. These actions reflect the principle of sustainable partnership to engage in development to achieve the objectives of the university. The university aims to contribute to the dissemination and awareness of the university community about the Kingdom's vision and the programs emanating from it, which helps increase the university's positive societal contribution at all levels and sectors [6].

In Saudi Arabia, some education facilities hire workers from low-income countries to work in maintenance, cleaning, and security sections. Those workers need social support as foreigners, in addition to following their health status. This is a good area for staff and students to provide their services to them as part of community services.

Access to quality healthcare is a fundamental human right. However, not everyone has equal access to healthcare due to many factors. One of them is lack of knowledge about healthcare resources and the difficulty of providing them with their needs.

Community service projects can provide free or low-cost healthcare to people who need it, educate people about healthcare, and advocate for policies that improve healthcare access, and the university is an ideal place to apply this.

From all the above-mentioned facts about the importance of community services and volunteering in Saudi Arabia, universities are one of the most suitable environments to practice and apply.

The aim of this article is to describe a community service experience by a university staff member and students to provide free social and medical services to employees and workers at the university. We aimed also to encourage students to be involved in such activities and build up skills other than education.

Methods:

It started with a simple idea to serve people in need who are working simple jobs at the college like cleaning and maintenance workers. Most of them are recruited from low-income countries. In 2008 I created an unofficial Facebook group of students who are interested in charity and volunteer and started brain storming discussion

and suggestions about practical and affordable ideas. Then after implementing and participating in the community services committee of the college, other staff members joined us, and many students were willing to participate. This gave us more chances for extending our activities and delivering our services to a larger number of people including employees and other students in addition to workers.

Participants:

The idea was conducted at Radiology sciences department, faculty of applied medical sciences, KAU, Saudi Arabia. Our services were open to all employees and workers at the university, regardless of their age, gender, income, or insurance status. It was staffed by a radiology professor, as well as a team of students and staff volunteers.

Activities and services:

Every year we share our suggestions and ideas then select one or two of them every month to implement it. Lot of ideas were discussed and applied over the past twelve years, but documents are available for the past 5 years only. Here are some examples of the services provided.

We provided financial support in the form of “free coupons” to be used at the cafeteria by workers at the female section. We also collected extra clothes from our homes and relatives and added brand new clothes and presents gave to them in a nice party – not to make them feel embarrassed-. this was done almost annually in both the male and female sections.

Because most workers are from outside KSA, leaving their homes and families behind them, one of our main goals is to make them feel they are within their families specially in annual occasions. So, we planned to hold a party for the at least once per year, sharing meals with them, give them some presents, and this was done for each of male and female campus workers.

We also offered a variety of medical services, including blood pressure checks to all employees, workers, and students to exclude hypertension.

When we had more than one of Ultrasound machine with high specifications, we decided to make neck ultrasound as a screening tool for hidden thyroid lesions specially in the male section and referred them to other medical providers when necessary.

After the progression of the community service activities in the college and university, many committees were established and it has been a national concern, it was the time to spread our activities to the community outside the university.

We visited geriatric care homes and provided old age women with simple lectures about hygiene, importance of sun exposure, physical activities, healthy eating and other important daily life skills.

We also planned visits to some hospitals concerned with pediatric cancers and disabilities in addition to orphans. We tried to make enjoyable time for them full of fun, laughs, toys and presents.

We decided to spread knowledge about health aspects to the community like obesity, osteoporosis, smoking, and the importance of blood donation through holding campaigns in outdoor areas like shopping malls and schools after taking the official permissions.

We also gave emphasis about the important health issues that concern the community like breast cancer and colon cancer, as its frequency is high in the Kingdom. Every year on the International Day of Breast cancer. We visited many places that include women as the major groups like girls’ schools, female sections of governmental associations, sports clubs and other places to give lectures about the importance of screening mammography and breast self-examination.

Our activities were sometimes held on and limited due to out of hand factors like summer vacations, covid pandemic so we focused on online lectures to spread knowledge about some diseases that are important to the community such as brain stroke, depression, addiction and much more.

Sharing in the radiology day annually by providing information about the importance of medical imaging, benefits and hazards of radiation, risk of contrast media used in imaging, and the difference between different imaging modalities was one of our annually concerns. We invited secondary school students to provide them information about radiation hazards during these activities.

Results:

Although we started our activities more than ten years ago, we have documents about events and number of participants for the last 5 years.

The number of students who took part in the activities over the past 5 years was about 80 students annually (about 20% of all students), in addition to 4-6 of the department staff members every year.

The number of participants who benefit from our activities is shown in table 1.

Activity/ service	Number of beneficiaries
Free food coupons	70
Pediatric patients and orphans	165
Geriatrics	30
Blood pressure check	120
Thyroid US	95
Clothes donation	700
Online lectures audiences	350
Holly month of Ramadan food boxes	500

Breast cancer campaign attendants	1550
Party's attendants	455
Schools' students	300

Table 1: number of receivers of each service.

Results of healthcare services:

Hypertension was seen in 11 workers and 2 female employees. We advised them to book at the university clinic for further assessment.

Benign incidental thyroid findings were seen in 30 out of 95 participants including tiny cysts or nodules. One participant had a suspicious thyroid nodule and was referred to the surgical clinic for biopsy.

On site and online healthcare education lectures showed a great impact on the audience which appeared during their discussion and enquiries during the lectures. Our services helped to raise awareness of the importance of healthcare access.

Feedback of participants and volunteers:

We usually send a questionnaire asking for feedback from our target population and all of them were grateful and satisfied by the services provided to them and asked for more. More knowledge was gained regarding important and serious medical problems, especially breast cancer, brain stroke, depression, and autism. They admitted that much information was very valuable and added much to them. Employees and students were satisfied for the provided medical services. In addition, workers were very grateful for the medical, social, and financial support provided to them.

The students who participated in these activities were pleased by the way they could engage in community problems; they got clinical skills such as accurately measuring blood pressure in addition to teamwork, problem solving and how to share tasks together.

Our services were also well-received by the university community and were encouraged and facilitated by means of permissions to do the activities and announcements for it on the college website.

Discussion:

Community service volunteering (CSV) is a significant part of the university experience for many students. It allows students to learn outside of the classroom, develop new skills, and make a positive impact on their community [1].

Community service and volunteering are essential components of a well-rounded university experience. They provide students with opportunities to give back to their communities, develop new skills, and learn more about themselves and the world around them.

There are many ways for university students to get involved in community service and volunteering. Some students choose to volunteer with local organizations, Others may choose to participate in service-learning programs, which combine academic coursework with community service. Still others may choose to start their own social ventures or volunteer abroad. University campuses are often home to a variety of resources that can help students get involved in community service and volunteering.

Benefits of volunteering on mental, physical, and social health and well-being, particularly reduced mortality, and increased functioning, quality of life, pride, empowerment, motivation, social support, and sense of community were proved [7].

Our services gave great opportunities to students to find a way to get involved in social work and community services that is meaningful to them.

We believe that no matter how students choose to get involved, community service and volunteering can have a profound impact on their lives. Here are just a few of the benefits of community service and volunteering for university students including personal development, academic success, Career opportunities, and community impact.

Volunteering can be a useful component of a link worker's arsenal for assisting people in need. Our review highlights that volunteering is a means of helping people to experience a changed sense of self and their perceived place in the world. Feeling needed and appreciated can augment volunteers' well-being[8].

A study revealed that people in the community must assume personal responsibility to become self-reliant [10].

We noticed that the social and medical services provided to the participants increased their appreciation and loyalty to the working place. This was more appreciated in non-Saudi workers who were grateful to staff and students and felt that they have second families that are caring about them.

Our services provided free medical examinations to people who are not aware of the importance of regular medical checkups and early detection of serious diseases. It also helped to educate people about healthcare and advocate for policies that improve healthcare access. In addition, most of the workers come from low-income countries that lack education and healthcare services. Educating those workers was one of our targets to improve their quality of life and then their ability to work in a familiar community.

This activity is also an example of how community service can be incorporated into a university setting. The project was staffed by staff members, as well as a team of student volunteers. This allowed the project to provide free social and medical services to the university community while also providing educational opportunities for students.

Sharing in community services events did not affect the academic performance of students. On the other way, all students who were involved in our groups and committee showed high grades in all college years.

There are a few other studies that have examined the benefits of community service volunteering for university students. For example, a study by Astin and Sax (1998) found that students who participated in community service were more likely to graduate from college, have higher GPAs, and be satisfied with their college experience [10].

Another study by Eyler and Giles (1999) found that students who participated in service-learning courses were more likely to report that their service experience had a positive impact on their academic learning, personal development, and career goals [11].

These studies suggest that community service volunteering can be a valuable experience for university students in a number of ways mainly in their self-development [12].

For example, many universities have service-learning centers that offer students opportunities to participate in structured service-learning programs. Universities also often have student organizations and clubs that are dedicated to community service and volunteering [11].

Students can also find community service and volunteering opportunities through their academic departments. Many departments offer courses that incorporate community service into the curriculum. Additionally, some departments have faculty members who are involved in community-based research projects that students can volunteer to work on.

Recent research revealed that students who have done volunteer work during their higher education studies are more dedicated. It would be necessary to guide students towards volunteering to increase their persistence, among other goals. The first step to achieving this could be the inclusion of service-learning courses in the curriculum, perhaps even in a compulsory manner, as it has been successfully carried out in public education. Besides curricular service learning, the expansion of extracurricular opportunities would also be necessary, where trained professionals may offer career-focused volunteer work opportunities to students [13].

Conclusion and recommendation:

This article has described a community service experience by a radiology staff member and some of colleagues and students. We provided free social and medical services to employees and workers at our college and some of the university facilities. The project helped to educate people about healthcare and advocate for policies that improve healthcare access. In addition, community service volunteering showed a valuable experience for the students. It helped them to develop a variety of skills, learn about different cultures and perspectives, and develop a sense of civic responsibility. Universities can play a role in encouraging community service volunteering among their students by offering service-learning courses, creating a culture of service, and partnering with community organizations to create volunteer opportunities for their students.

Acknowledgement:

Deep thanks to all students who gave their time, effort, and brilliant ideas to support these activities. Thanks, are also due to my colleagues who shared with us and encouraged our efforts to provide the best to our community. And finally, thanks to the authorized people of the department and college who gave us the facilities and permissions needed to achieve this success.

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