

The role of a selected group of healthcare providers as a source of health information: A primary study

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Healthcare providers (HCPs) are widely regarded as the most reliable source of health information, yet their role in Sri Lanka has remained underexplored. This study aimed to describe the types of health-related support requested, the nature of support provided, and HCPs' perceptions of their information-giving role. Associations between variables were also assessed. A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 167 HCPs working at two Base Hospitals. A self-administered questionnaire captured socio-demographic and occupational data, patterns of health information requests, support provided, and self-perceptions. Descriptive statistics summarised the data, and the chi-square tests assessed the relationship between variables. Most were females (67.7%), and nursing officers (68.3%) with ≤ 24 years of service (83.8%). The majority (86.8%, $n = 46/53$) had a specialisation related to the healthcare field. Immediate family of the HCP (82.6%), patients (82.0%) and colleagues (76.0–80.8%) were the commonest information seekers, typically contacting HCPs at least weekly (59.9%) via face-to-face encounters (92.2%) or phone calls (83.2%). Frequently requested topics were information about disease management (82.6%), diet (74.3%) and hygiene (73.7%). HCPs rated their knowledge-sharing role highly; 92% perceived their knowledge level as high, and most scored their supportiveness between 80%-100%. Longer service duration was positively associated with supportiveness but inversely related to training programme attendance, while qualification level showed weak associations with dissemination competence. The study emphasises the crucial role of HCPs in disseminating health information and the need for continuous professional development to enhance their effectiveness.

Keywords: *Healthcare Providers (HCPs), Health information seeking, Sources of health information, Knowledge dissemination, Perception*