

Improving the Quality of Professional Life: Benefits of Health Education and Promotion Association Membership

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Abstract

Membership in national, regional, and state health education and promotion associations can be beneficial to the new and/or prospective academic professional. Association membership benefits include (but are not limited to) professional development opportunities for developing presentation skills, exposure to current research and pedagogy, career development, and networking. The purpose of this article is to 1) outline benefits of association membership for the new and/or prospective health educator, 2) provide a list of current health education and promotion associations, and 3) encourage membership and active participation in professional associations for the new, prospective, and/or seasoned health education and promotion professional.

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Introduction

The purpose of this article is to outline benefits of joining professional associations. There are many, including the opportunity for service within the health promotion profession. Membership in health promotion associations represents a variety of disciplines, including health education, health promotion, public health, nursing, and behavioral science. All members, regardless of discipline, background, degree or profession convene at professional meetings to further the mission of health education and promotion, expand their professional horizons, and to meet with new as well as known colleagues and friends. Benefits for professional membership are addressed in some of the literature (Desmond & Symens, 1997; Hall, 1993; Logemann, 1994). This article highlights some of those benefits. Benefits of association membership include but are not limited to, professional development opportunities for developing presentation skills, exposure to current research and pedagogy, career development, and networking.

Presentation Skills

One of the most important benefits of professional membership(s) is the opportunity to present at one of the many health education and promotion conferences hosted by professional organizations throughout the academic year. One can attend conferences at international, national, regional, state, and local levels. Attendance at the various professional meetings provides a new and/or prospective health educator with the opportunity to become a well-rounded professional.

As a new and/or prospective professional in the field of health education and promotion, the development of presentation skills is essential. Research continues to indicate that public speaking is the third most feared event in one's life (Motely, 1997). Practice and skill-building activities may ease anxiety and fear associated with public speaking for the new and/or prospective professional. Presenting at a professional conference is one type of an activity that may help. Professional associations carefully list and define the various types of

presentation sessions available to the health educator; an example of this is the “call for conference presentations” advertised via a professional association. Each professional association typically lists proposal deadlines and requirements as well as the various types of presentation formats (poster and oral sessions, roundtable discussions, panels, etc.) and instructional media (PowerPoint, overhead, slide projector, etc.) that may be used for a particular conference session. In addition, the health educator is given exposure to new and popular types of presentation formats and instructional media currently used within the profession. A new and/or prospective health education and promotion professional benefits from this by being exposed to current trends of presentation topics and media not only in their respective discipline, but also throughout the field of health education and promotion. For example, a growing trend in the last decade has been the use of online electronic communication media including technology based instructional tools and discussion groups such as the Health Education Directory (HEDIR) (Kittleson, 2003). The HEDIR is an electronic listserv for health education related news (<http://www.hedir.org>). Many health education and promotion conferences integrate a technology-based format for presentations in addition to the traditional presentation format.

Conference attendance can also provide the new and/or prospective health and promotion professional with the opportunity to collaborate with other professionals. Collaboration can be within one’s specialized area of interest as well as in new and/or undiscovered academic arenas. The opportunity to collaborate, co-present, and interact with other seasoned professionals at conferences is possible and can be very beneficial to a new and/or prospective health education and promotion professional.

Exposure to Current Research and Pedagogy

An additional and related benefit to professional membership(s) is the interactive exposure to current research and pedagogy at professional meetings and conferences. For new professionals, attending or participating in poster sessions is one of the best ways to meet the

“faces behind the names” of familiar (and unfamiliar) authors and researchers. Most presenters are more than willing to talk about their research and pedagogy. Conference presenters are generally enthusiastic and eager to discuss and share new ideas and approaches to research and pedagogy. Similarly, the lecture presentation format (also referred to as oral presentations) provides a type of exposure to new and current research. Time for questions and comments is generally allotted at the conclusion of a presentation, which allows presenters to interact with his or her audience. This time allows the new and/or prospective health educator to ask questions and to discuss and explore new ideas related to the research under review. Interacting with other professionals as an avenue to stay current with research is certainly valuable, and there are other benefits to this as well. Initial conversations with health education and promotion professionals may lead to further conversations and discussions (asking for a business card or providing one is a good idea), with the possibility of a mentoring or collaborative relationship. As a new and/or prospective professional, meeting others in the field is helpful when developing collaborative relationships for manuscript and grant writing activities. It is helpful to know others in the field when job searching. Other professionals can provide references, job leads, or serve as mentors, offering guidance and direction throughout the career of a new professional (Grosshans, Poczwardowski, Trunnell, & Ransdell, 2003). A further discussion of this benefit can be found in the “networking section” of this article.

Keeping current with trends and issues in the health education and promotion field is essential for new and/or prospective health educators (plus it is one of the competencies for entry level health educators). For Certified Health Education Specialists (CHES) and other certifications or licensures, it is a requirement to stay current with health education issues through obtaining continuing education contact hours or continuing education units on a regular basis. Opportunities for continuing education units are available in many of the health education and

promotion journals and at hosted conference sessions of the professional association(s).

An additional and related benefit to membership in professional associations is the exposure to current research and pedagogy through articles in professional journals, by exposure to other professionals, and by presenting one's research or pedagogy at conferences. Most association membership benefits include subscription to at least one journal. Typically, this is a refereed journal that publishes the most current research and pedagogy actively conducted within the health education, health promotion, or public health field. Many professional associations also have additional or other types of publications such as a newsletter. For new

and/or prospective professionals, having a subscription to at least one professional journal is helpful in staying current with research trends and pedagogical issues in health education and promotion. Table 1 lists a selection of health education and health promotion associations. Each of these associations provides or contains one or more published journals that are provided with membership. For example, the American Academy of Health Behavior publishes the American Journal of Health Behavior and the American Association for Health Education publishes the American Journal of Health Education. All of the associations and their respective journals listed in the table are reputable within the field of health education and promotion.

Table 1
Selected Professional Health Education and Health Promotion Associations and Journals

Association Name	Membership Fees	Journal
American Academy of Health Behavior http://www.aahb.org	Upon application approval: \$105	American Journal of Health Behavior
American Association for Health Education http://www.aaheinfo.org	Student: \$45 Professional: \$125	1. American Journal of Health Education 2. International Electronic Journal of Health Education
American College Health Association http://www.acha.org	Student: \$35 Professional: \$130	Journal of American College Health
American Public Health Association http://www.apha.org	Student: \$50 Professional: \$160	American Journal of Public Health
American School Health Association http://www.ashaweb.org	Student: \$40 Professional: \$110	1. Journal of School Health 2. Health in Action
Association of State and Territorial Directors of Health Promotion and Public Health Education http://www.astdhpphe.org/	Associate: \$25	
Eta Sigma Gamma http://www.bsu.edu/web/esg/	Student: \$40 Professional: \$50	1. The Health Educator 2. Health Education Monograph Series
International Union for Health Promotion and Education http://www.iuhpe.org	Student: \$50 Professional: \$100	1. Health Education Research 2. Health Promotion International 3. Promotion & Education
Society for Public Health Education http://www.sophe.org	Student: \$50 Professional: \$105	1. Health Education and Behavior 2. Health Promotion Practice
Society of State Directors of Health, Physical Education and Recreation http://www.hsc.usf.edu/CFH/cnheo/ssdhper.htm		

Career Development Opportunities

Whether a new and/or prospective health educator is looking for employment, internships, and/or potential funding sources, health education and promotion professional associations offer a wealth of information. Potential graduates may learn about employment opportunities through the association's website, other electronic career venues such as a listserv (an example is the HEDIR), and/or through the traditional paper format. Most professional associations provide employment information through various "hardcopy" formats such as newsletters or journals. These publications are generally sent out on a monthly basis and are filled with employment listings for full time and/or part time academic and non-academic positions.

Professional associations also provide other employment venues such as "career booths" at conferences. Most national level conferences provide a career booth area at the association's hosted conference, as well as meeting times where actual job interviews can take place. University search committee members' coordinate interviews with a prospective candidate. The benefit of hand delivering one's resume and sharing one's philosophy in person with a prospective employer in comparison to a mail delivered approach can be significant in the job search of a prospective candidate. Attendance at conferences also provides both the candidate and prospective employers with the opportunity to observe one another in different formal and informal settings.

Membership within a health education and promotion association can also provide the health educator with the use of an electronic listserv. Employment vacancies are posted on a professional listserv on a regular and sometimes daily basis. A listserv can also provide the health educator with an online interaction. This is very important to the health educator residing in remote areas of the country. With Internet access, new and/or prospective health educators living in rural areas can immediately be connected to others in the field. Online interactions such as a Listserv may lessen some of the potential isolation felt by rural health

education and promotion professionals. A Listserv can be an invaluable tool to the health educator. A posting of professional topics and issues, employment opportunities, funding sources, and the general camaraderie that is present on a listserv, enables the health educator to be an active participant in the health education and promotion profession.

Networking

Dale Carnegie once said, "You never have a second chance to make a first impression." A universal selling point of every health education and promotion professional association is the enormous networking opportunities available to its members. Networking plays an important role to the new and/or prospective health educator in that it serves as a "gateway" to professional connections. The assumption of networking is to make professional contacts with other professionals. These connections can lead to professional collaboration and support for a new and/or prospective health educator. Undoubtedly, networking leads to professional interactions. Networking also helps the health educator to develop and nurture professional relationships that can lead to collegiality and friendship. Networking with other professionals enables the new and/or prospective health educator to become a visible and viable contributor to the profession.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this article was to highlight benefits of joining professional associations and how this contributes to improving the quality of one's professional life. It outlines several of the benefits of joining a professional health education and promotion association including presentation skills, opportunities to learn about current research and pedagogy, career opportunities, networking, and overall professional development. Additional benefits (worthy of mention) include emphasis on the opportunity to meet new colleagues and friends who (within a short amount of time) often become what some would call a "professional family." Ancillary benefits also include the opportunity to travel to different cities and states for conferences. Some associations provide travel scholarships and awards for conference

attendance. Associations with regional and/or state chapters typically have more accessible conferences that are centrally located within its area. However, national conferences are scheduled in various locations, (often times) in a convenient city for members in different regions. New Orleans, San Diego, Atlanta, Chicago, and Washington D.C., are all popular conference locations. Other locations have included San Francisco, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and El Paso. Travel is definitely an added benefit to association membership.

One of the most important benefits to professional membership is reflected in a quote by Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941): "I slept and dreamt that life was all joy. I awoke and saw that life was but service. I served and understood that service was joy." Service is inherent to the health promotion profession. As health educators, we provide a service to our professional and social communities. It is important for new and/or prospective professionals to show involvement in service activities within their profession. This includes joining professional associations, attending and

presenting at conferences, as well as being involved in the various aspects of an organization or association. Furthermore, active participation in a professional organization or association allows new and/or prospective health educators to list their involvement on their resume and curriculum vita.

Membership in a professional association provides an opportunity to serve on committees. Participation in health education and promotion associations, such as serving on committees and being actively involved, extends to one's community and professional work environment. Professional membership in any one or more of the health education and promotion associations is beneficial to the new and/or prospective health educator, to his or her employer, community, and as importantly, its benefit on a personal level. One of the most significant benefits of a professional membership is the opportunity to grow on a professional and personal level surrounded by support and encouragement of other health educators who also want to help nurture the future of the health education and promotion field.

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