



Background

Educators and students in the health sciences need to engage with human rights education in their curricula and in practice. Health professionals are in powerful positions to advance social justice as duty bearers and as rights holders.

The Heuristic Key assists teaching for and about human rights. Developed by a facilitator in health and human rights workshops for Year 3 medical students in their Obstetrics and Gynaecology rotation, the Key has been evaluated by students over the past 3 years in an overwhelmingly positive manner.

Aim

To facilitate students' understanding of human rights in the reality of their practice in the context of women's health.

Method

Using a series of paper templates in a sequential process, I explain through a human rights lens, the multiple interrelated dimensions of health. I describe the global, regional and local influences, the effect of the media and the role of non-governmental organizations. Looking inwardly I encourage self reflection towards the goal of an integrated health professional¹.

The importance of education coupled with an awareness of rights then leads students to understand the relevance of the international, regional and local human rights instruments in guiding practice.

Findings

Students find the Key a valuable aid to develop their own meanings, connecting human rights to health.

Conclusion

Complex concepts are clarified leading to students learning the interconnectivity between human rights, their personal realities, legal mechanisms and clinical practice.

Table illustrating examples used to explain the symbolic meaning of the Key components

The Key	Description of concept / legal instrument	Examples of probing questions and discussion topics
	Everyone owns a human rights Key – an entitlement The Key is shaped by political, cultural, social and economic factors	How much choice do women have regarding their health decisions? Can they close doors and lock them to resist human rights abuses? Can they open doors to be empowered?
	International influences Consider the impact of transnational companies and intergovernmental organizations - positive / negative	How is globalisation affecting our health rights? What about medicine pricing?
	National influences South Africa's Constitution provides for the enforcement of socio-economic rights. Yet inequalities prevail with disparities evident between • Urban / rural health establishments • Public / private health services	How effective has SA's new democracy been for the users of our health system? Women living in rural areas face multiple layers of vulnerability, e.g. they experience fewer choices relating to reproductive rights such as less opportunity to effect their choice on abortion ² .
	Integrated health professional As an empathic practitioner, there is a duty to • Promote advocacy • Facilitate agency • Raise awareness of human rights	Are medical practitioners gatekeepers or advocates for human rights? Do they inform girls of their rights e.g. the availability of emergency contraception in SA for those aged 12 years & over (Children's Act 2005).
	Legal framework The codification of human rights sets norms and standards to guide Governments' obligations to • Respect • Promote • Protect • Fulfil human rights for all	What do the legal documents mean to health professionals? Dual loyalty situations may arise - what then?
	Obstacles & constraints Realizing rights means overcoming the reality of possible political, social, religious and economic barriers in the lived experiences of all people	Considering the Right to Health: Facilities – Are the opening hours for health clinics respectful for all users? Goods – Are essential drugs available for all? Services – Are there enough health professionals to provide for the needs of the community?

"I think the idea of the key illustrates our personal rights as well as our responsibility to uphold other people's rights."

"it was helpful in showing the layers of issues which affect any given right"

"it helps with understanding the dynamics of Human rights. Human rights occur on a global, national, personal and societal levels and by this model I was able to see this"

"...highlights the importance of collaborative effort from health professionals + organizations + patients in implementing Rights"

"...able to break down complex issues and relate it back to individuals. "Give our patients the key to unlock their doors"

References

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