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Lesson Plan: Improving Customer Service at Veterans Affairs Healthcare Facilities

Rationale: The Veteran's Health Administration (VHA) issues a handbook outlining the procedures for establishing a comprehensive Veteran Customer Service Program. VA staff must learn the key elements of VHA's Veteran Customer Service Program. It is the commitment of the VHA to provide world-class service to veterans within a patient-focused culture. As part of this commitment, the VHA embraces the Balridge Health Care Criteria for Performance Excellence, the Joint Commission for Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations Standards, and the Commission on Accreditation and Rehabilitation Facilities Standards. The creation of a comprehensive Veteran Customer Service Program is consistent with the mission of the VA's Vision 2020 to improve patient satisfaction with their health care through the implementation of Service Recovery (SR) program that identifies service failures, and resolve customer problem. Hence, there is a need for the staff of VA healthcare facilities to be informed on the latest development and standards on customer service. Their knowledge will help them provide the highest quality care to the veterans.

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify and define the key elements of VHA's Veteran Customer Service Program
2. Demonstrate adequate knowledge on the VHA's Veteran Customer Service Program.
3. Develop and propose ways on implementing the and adopting the VHA 's Veterans Customer Service Program.

Learner Characteristics: The target audience for this lesson plan is the staff of VA health facility. The VA Staff is a diverse group of workers with different race, gender, educational attainment and cultural background, including language. It is very important to note that a diverse audience requires a special model of teaching and learning theory. More importantly, adult learning is

different from child learning. Although it has always been assumed teaching adults is easier than teaching children, Brookfield (1995) argues that this is not the case. According to Brookfield (1995) there are roadblocks to the development of theory on adult learning such as that adult learning is naturally joyful, that adult learners are inherently self-directed and that adult learning is totally different from learning in children. Brookfield (1995) stresses that some adult learners are not self-directed and needed to be led each step of the way. Moreover, Brookfield asserts that “a strong case can be made that . . . variables of culture, ethnicity, personality and political ethos assume far greater significance in explaining how learning occurs and is experienced than does the variable of chronological age” (p. 1). Hence, it is necessary that a teaching-learning model adopted for this curriculum which targets adult audience must utilize a model that meets the learning needs of the adult learners. Young (2003) states that: “From what most people do agree on, we can state that the teacher who takes an adult learning model into consideration when teaching will be less of a disseminator of information and director of the learning process and more of a facilitator.” Galbraith (1991) further states that the teacher will need to take on the roles of guide, coach, mentor, role model, challenger, and motivator. Young (2003) explains that the “teacher should have confidence in most adult learners’ abilities to self-plan learning experiences and should see him- or herself as taking part in a dialogue among equals.”

Design Model: As this curriculum is geared towards the VA staff, all of whom are adult learners, the design model adopted for this curriculum is geared towards adult learning. For this curriculum, Malcolm Knowles (1984) A Model of Adult Learning will be used. Knowles (1984) started working on his Model of Adult Learning as early as the 1970s when he began to promote the movement that education for adults was different from the education of children. Knowles

(1984) adopted the term andragogy to differentiate the teaching of adults from pedagogy, the teaching of children. Knowles (1984) model of adult learning can be summarized in three ways:

First those adults are motivated to learn information for which they understand the purpose and see practical applications. Second, they want to take some control of their learning process and be self-directed. Third, they want their life experience to be considered in the learning situation and also want to learn from others' experiences (Young, 2003, p. 23).

Learning Theory: Learning theories are very important in formulating a curriculum because they serve a very important purpose. Learning theories “tie together those concepts and propositions that teachers often repeat. Learning theories take concepts and propositions (statements of the relationships between concepts) and fit them together to explain why people learn and predict under what circumstances they will learn” (Young, 2003). The Learning Theory adopted for this curriculum is the Social Learning Theory or the Social Cognitive Theory. Earlier proposed by Albert Bandura (1977), Social Learning Theory states that “motivation for learning will determine which modeled behaviors are enacted. A person is motivated when he or she sees the possibility of valued outcomes as opposed to unrewarding or punishing outcomes. Perceived reward, therefore, is a good motivator and helps people attend to modeled behavior and enact it” (Young, 2003). There are several key components of this theory.

- First, people learn as they are in constant interaction with their environment. Most learning occurs as a result of observing other people's behavior and its consequences (Young, 2003);
- Second, attentional processes determine which modeled behaviors will be learned. People perceive and attend to only a certain number of modeled behaviors.

Characteristics of the individual, the modeled activities themselves, and the social interactions in which the learner engages determine which behaviors are attended to (Young, 2003);

- Third, retention processes refer to the ability to retain modeled behaviors in permanent memory. For retention to occur, people must retain a mental image of the modeled behavior or a verbal symbol that is easily recalled (an example is remembering a numbered list of activities involved in a skill). These mental images or verbal symbols are types of schemata (Young, 2003);

Bandura (1977) asserts that although learning process begins with observation, expertise is developed through practice.

Completion of content outline: The syllabus of this curriculum of Customer Service for VA healthcare facilities includes the following:

Key Elements of VHA's Veteran Customer Service Program.

1. Purpose
2. Background
3. Scope
4. Communication
5. Service Recovery:
6. Patient Advocacy: Implementation of Patient Advocacy Program
7. Information and Analysis of Veterans Satisfaction: interviews, focus groups, mystery shoppers, Surveys, PULSE toolkit, Comment Cards
8. Staff Focus: Staff Recruitment, Performance Standards, Education and Empowerment, Rewards and Recognition

Instructional methods to be used for delivery: Educator's instructional methods limited into the resources available at the learning institution such as classroom size, furniture, lighting, availability of technology, and availability of other instructional equipment and supplies all determine which strategies may be used (Young, 2030). It is imperative that instructional methods be chosen according to the needs of the target learners (Weston and Cranton, 1986). Instructional methods selected should emphasize the participation of target audience such as discussion, case studies and simulations, role-playing and cooperative learning (Young, 2003).

For this curriculum, instructional materials to be used include the VHA Handbook 1003.1, articles on the prevailing Customer Services in various VA facilities and statistics on customer satisfaction, as well as video of VA facilities know of its excellent Customer Service Program. A trip to a VA facility may also be scheduled. Resource speakers from the Department of Veterans Affairs will be invited to give a short lecture.

Identification of evaluation methods. Evaluation methods for this learning process can be done through the following:

1. Written evaluation to gauge the information and knowledge learned by the target audience through an examination.
2. Formulation of Customer Service Plan based on the VHA Standards.
3. Analysis of various case studies involving ethical and racial issues.
4. In-class exercise where adult learners are tasked to present how they would handle different issues in customer service and relations.
5. Self-reflection paper of the target audience regarding their learning experience and how they could apply the knowledge they have gained in their respective jobs.

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