

## **"COACH BOT" PROJECT: AN E-LEARNING PATH TO ANSWER TO THE HOME HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS' TRAINING NEEDS**

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The 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2009 was arranged in Rome the first National Seminar for the presentation of the European project "COACH BOT" coordinated by the interuniversity Consortium FOR.COM. with the collaboration of a multi-actor partnership which includes in total seven organizations from six different countries: Consorzio FOR.COM. Formazione per la Comunicazione (Italy), Aarhus Social and Health Care College (Denmark), Gruppo Pragma S.r.l. (Italy), Romanian Society for Lifelong Learning (Romania), Secondary school of nursing Ljubljana (Slovenia), Norton Radstock College (United Kingdom), Seed Association (Switzerland).

The COACH BOT project ("Modular e-course with virtual coach tool support") aims at designing a new e-learning methodology that combines the Conversational Agent Technology (chat-bot) with an ad hoc designed modular learning path. The e-course intends to respond to the training needs of the health care system. In particular, it is addressed to the home healthcare professionals (nurses, social and car workers, physiotherapists, doctors, etc.) who especially works with elderly people, people with disabilities and with terminal ill or chronic diseases.

To the Italian National Seminar took part representatives of several home healthcare professions, especially professionals of the Italian public centers for the home healthcare assistance (CAD - Centri Assistenza Domiciliare), other centers under the health boards coordination (in Italy known as A.S.L.- Azienda Sanitaria Locale) or social-health services which provide assistance to elderly people, people with disabilities and with terminal ill or chronic diseases, social associations accredited by the National Health Service for ADI (Integrated Homecare) services. The participants were for the most part women and there were also a significant number of foreign people who live and work in Italy as home helpers and OSS/OA (Care workers).

After some presentations related to the project main goals, the e-course description and the training opportunities for the healthcare sector in Italy, it has been arranged *two focus groups* respectively with 8 and 11 participants.

The focus groups aimed to analyze in depth the training needs of home care professionals as well as to investigate on the users

familiarity with the PC and the e-learning tools. In particular, it has been investigated on the following topics:

- activities currently performed by home healthcare professionals
- gratification and weaker aspects of their daily work experience
- lacks and training needs self-perceived
- previous experiences of e-learning
- expectations, doubts and difficulties about the COACH BOT on-line course

In order to support the focus groups a detection sheet and an exploratory survey have been distributed to all participants. The focus groups have been conducted through the following steps:

1. *Participants short presentation*: country of origin, how long they have been living in Italy, how long they have been working in this sector, professional, title of the study, which certifications/ attestations they have related to the social healthcare, kind of job they have frequently done, more frequent type of patients treated.
2. *Description of the positive and rewarding aspects of their daily work activity* they feel as strongly characterizing their profession and their work. To better contextualize the contributions it has been asked participants to describe concrete examples, stimulating then the comparison in relation to similar episodes and situations.
3. *Problems encountered in their daily work activity and the gaps with the skills possessed*. It has been asked participants to describe situations in which they self-perceived difficulty in proposing an effective response to users.
4. In depth analysis and sharing among participants of particular episodes in which they have had difficulties in supporting users, in particular related to: support the user in his/her daily activities and in recreation activities, how to communicate with elderly people, how to communicate with people with disabilities, how to establish a help relationship, European/national laws on homecare, ethical aspects, codes of honour, cultural differences in approaching patients.
5. Previous experience in the use of *e-learning* platforms highlighting potential difficulties, level of proficiency in English

and expectations and difficulties related to the COACH BOT course methodology.

At the end of the focus groups the conductors suggested to all participants a summary of training needs identified by the two groups with the purpose to find with the audience a common agreement about the priorities that emerged.

From the analysis of data collected during the focus groups the following main topics are came out as pivotal in the home health care professions:

- *THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PATIENT.* Contributing to the improvement or taking care cure of the patient, fostering his/her social integration is the most rewarding aspect of the home care profession. Many participants highlighted that often the home care professional become a fundamental reference-point for the daily life of the patient.
- *SHARING OF EXPERIENCES AMONG THE STAFF WHO WORKS IN THE SAME SERVICE.* A positive aspect of the home care profession is the opportunity to work in team with people with different professionalities, open to debate in an atmosphere of collaboration by establishing a relationship based on exchange of experience that causes a positive effect for the patient.
- *LACK OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT.* Often patients need a psychological support. Sometimes patients believe that they can heal, but their expectations do not always reflect reality, so it can occur reactions of disappointment, depression, anger and frustration. Psychological support also becomes necessary for the homecare professionals. Not always they are able to manage the stress alone. Often they are not unable to maintain separate professional and private life. Psychological support also is crucial for patients' family.
- *COMMUNICATION WITH THE PATIENT'S FAMILY.* The excessive presence or the complete absence of patients' family members can trigger difficulties in establishing an adequate communication. Being the point of reference for the patient is often a burden too great for the home care professionals, although it also is a source of gratification. Sometimes, they are unable to establish a relationship of trust with the families of patients.

- *LACK OF A SPECIFIC ROLE.* Often home care professionals do not have a clear and defined role. They try to solve this unclear situation doing activities that go far beyond their competences but that increase the unclear definition of their professional role.
- *RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN ACTIONS.* Home care professionals have a heavy responsibility in their work, not only toward the patient. They have to manage a complex situation, taking into account different aspects and a code of ethics, which is not always clear.

After the desk research and need analysis previously carried out at European level, the National Seminar wanted to be an important opportunity for meeting the home health care professionals and through the focus groups it has been possible to share ideas and to collect their training needs and requirements.

These information are crucial for the developing of the e-course both in term of modules contents and in term of methodological/ technological aspects. Actually the COACH BOT didactical staff is in charge of the production of the course contents such as the audio lessons, lecture notes and quizzes, as well as the technological staff is in charge of the setting up the e-learning platform. Thanks to the information collected the COACH BOT staff is developing an e-learning course that best fits the final users' training needs and requirements.

In fact, as results of the research developed it is came out that home health care staff are overloaded with work and they have short time for participating in training and they work irregular. In this context, from a methodological point of view, a web based training - available any time – represents the better learning solution of their need. Moreover, in order to answer to the need of sharing and cooperation among care professionals, as arisen from the focus groups, the COACH BOT e-learning platform also includes a social area (chat and forum) which allow learners coming from different countries to interact each other, to exchange and share their own experiences.

Overall, the training course contents has been designed taking into account the training need analysis results. In fact the course includes 15 modules focused on four main areas as follow: Medical issues (Support Individuals to access and participate in recreational activities, Support individuals in their daily living), Psychological issues

(Communication with dying patients and their family, Communication with patients with hearing disabilities, Communication with patients with seeing disabilities, Communication with elderly people, The relationship with patients family, Establishing a help relationship), National/EU health laws (Introduction to the main home health care worker EU legislation, Home health Care worker UK legislation, Home health care worker SI legislation), Social/ethical aspects (Nurse: professional code and ethical aspects, Cultural differences in approaching patients, Social Care Worker Professional Code, Self instruction and continuing learning).

These modules reflects the several aspects and topics that are arisen as pivotal for the home care professionals' daily work experiences, such as the relevant lack of professional and psychological support, the need to be able to manage the relationship with patients and their family, to support patients in all aspects of their daily living and to elaborate on the professional role and ethical aspects. Finally as consequence of the multiethnic and multicultural context it is appeared fundamental also deals with topics on cultural differences as well as provide home care professionals the need skills to self evaluate their own training needs.

