

Health Communication Strategies as Gateway to Effective Health Promotion and Well-being

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Abstract

This paper reviewed health communication strategies as gateway to effective health promotion and well-being. Health promotion supports personal and society development by providing information which improves health and enhance wellbeing. Communication creates meaning to any information given. Changing an already existing behaviour is very difficult. However, with effective communication and application of effective strategies, behavioural change could be achieved. Therefore, this paper expunges some of the strategies adopted by the health educator to influence people and bring about behavioural change. Some of them include; health campaign, newsletters/journals, bill board, radio/television and social/internet media. Benefits of health communication include increasing audiences' knowledge and awareness on health related issues and its advocacy for health issue and policies were identified. Also barriers such as low health literacy and poor communications were identified. It was concluded that health communications contribute to all aspects of disease prevention and health promotion. Hence, the recommendation is that health communication should be included in all levels of health's curriculum to enable health educators acquire better skill to promote health and improve well-being.

Keywords: Health communication strategies; Health promotion; Well-being

Introduction

Good health is the desire of every individual. The attainment of a good health depends on the individual's ability to live a positive lifestyle. Good health is difficult to be attained completely as human needs cannot be completely satisfied at any given time. Physically, one maybe healthy, but socially, mentally and otherwise one may not be healthy. Good health is motivated by one's lifestyle the way we appreciate things

that come our way determines how we manage stress which is one of the silent killers. Also, our behaviour or attitude about exercise (physical activates), nutrition, substance (alcohol, drug and cigarette) intake, healthy sexual life amongst others, all determines our health.

However, factual information is needed to help the individuals, groups and communities to understand effects of these to their lives. Information affects the perspectives of the recipient enhance should be communicated to the understanding of the people. Information given to clients/patients should be planned to suit the needs of the people. Different communication tools are often used as part of an effective communication plans and must serve its purpose. The strategic or plans adopted should be skillful to bring about positive change in behaviour. Skillful strategies adopted in communication opens way for proper understanding of health issues that affects the people and calls for behavioural change.

Achievement of good health depends upon adopting good health practices and avoiding those practices that are detrimental to health. Health education encourages healthy practices of life styles, prevents disease, reduces disabilities and promotes the well-being of people. Health education which aims at bringing Change in health behaviour must be tailored to the specific type of communication and tools that makes the outmost sense to the target audience. Therefore, Beato, Richrdo and Jana [1] explained that improving health literacy is achieved by disseminating health information that influences personal health choices. "The promotion, maintenance and restoration of health require community health related information."

To promote and sustain healthy behaviour, communication is very important. Health communication serves as the medium that is used to create awareness to the individual group and communities on health related issues. Health promotion provides knowledge, skills and capacity to assist individuals, groups and communities in identifying health needs, obtaining information and resources and mobilizing them to achieve change. However, WHO defined "health promotion as the process of enabling people to increase control over and to improve their health [2]."

Behavioural change is a difficult task to achieve. Hence factual information should be designed to motivate people achieve change in behaviour. Healthy behaviour such as participation in exercise, good nutrition, healthy sexual practices, avoiding of substance (alcohol, drug, cigarettes) abuse, routine medical check among others are practices that promote good health (well-being).

Concepts

Communication creates meaning to any information or message given. Health communication is transferring or giving information, persuading, influencing or warning clients/patients about risky behaviour. According to Achalu [3] and the Healthy people 2010, Health communication is an art and technique of informing influencing and motivating individual or groups about important health issues. Furthermore, in Rartzan [4] Health communication encompasses the study and use of communication strategies to inform and influence Individual and community decisions that enhance health.

Health communication strategies are those plans adopted by the health educator/ giver to inform and influence people to bring about behavioural change (knowledge, attitude). The ability of the health educator to efficiently implement these plans paves way to healthy life as miscommunication gives rise to risky behaviour.

Insel and Roth [5] viewed wellness as optimal health and vitality, encompassing, physical, emotional, Intellectual, spiritual, interpersonal and social and environmental well-being.

Health Communication Strategies

Information dissemination programmes methods makes use of variety of media to offer information to the public about the risk of a particular lifestyle, choices and personal behaviour as well as the benefits of changing that behaviour and improving the quality of life. The use of communication strategies is crucial to ensure optimum utilization of health information provided by the health educators so that individuals and communities may observe healthy living practices and seek appropriate medical help in due time. While transmitting information, it is important to maintain consistency in the aesthetic appearance, linguistics style, tone and message. Different people identified various health communication strategies. Amongst them are: Noar, Benac and Harris [6] explained some health communication strategies to include campaigns, entertainment advocacy, media advocacy, new technologies and inter personal communication.

Health communication campaign directly provides education to people who are expected to adopt or change to a healthier behaviour. Campaign achieves large audience and influence population to maintain and improve their health status. Centre for Rural Health [7] enlisted the health communication strategies to include; Radio, Televisions, Newspaper, Flyers, Brochure, Internet and Social Media. Furthermore, Rural Health Information Hub [8] expressed that

effective Health information communication strategies include; use of Research Based Strategies. In this, the peoples' cultures, setting and languages are given priorities. Wisdom is applied to archive this.

Also to be considered is the people health literacy. That is to know if the people are knowledgeable about the risky behaviour. The health educators consider the accessibility of the internet, media exposure as well as the cultural competency of the target population. Furthermore, development of materials such as brochures, bill board radio commercials, television broadcast, newspaper articles, public service announcement, newsletter, pamphlets, videos, digital tools, case studies, group discussions health fairs, field-trips and workshops helps to increase, influence social norms, increase availability of support or improve their health conditions. Some of the communication strategies to be utilized for optimum efficiency include:

Traditional and rural based communication

As the name implies, traditional and rural based communication is clearly designed to address the peculiar of the rural developers. Before the proliferation of modern technologies, communities devised their own strategies of communicating among themselves as well as in this era of media proliferation and advanced technology for communication. Computers and internet are not yet accessible to rural communities and most of the rural communities still rely on the traditional means of communication.

It is however, important to note that some of these rural communities have evolved in terms of embracing certain aspect of modern media for community mobilization for health campaign. Example is children immunization, political sensitization and others. Examples of traditional communication are town crier, age grade meetings and many more.

Town crier: It is a form of communication that had transcended generations of rural dwellers. The town crier is a significant village "broad caster" who summons villagers or decision maker on issues concerning the community." Even in the modern times, town crier still plays a pivot role in health advocacy and sensitization.

Age grade/gender meeting: It is another effective approach utilized to reach community members on health related issues. Various groups have specific days/ months for meeting and can therefore create an avenue for health educator to give her health related messages.

Broadcast media tools (Radio and television)

Broadcast media is used to capture wide audience within a defined time frame. Broadcasting is transmission of audio and video messages via electro-magnetic waves to reach millions of homes almost the same time. It is the most expedient means to transmit information immediately to the widest possible audience. The broadcast consist of the television and the radio media channels and both have been effective in

carrying successful health campaign. Health literacy is achieved through health communication. It explains medical jargon, ill-informed messages and corrects general educational gaps.

Radio broadcast: Radio programmers are less expensive than most television program and so a great choice for low cost budget. Large number of audiences turn and listen to their radios every day. Unlike Television, most radio stations are mobile and are designed to gauge audience response (www.Adoptahighway.com).

Television: Television has a wide geographic coverage and broad audience reach. It records success for promoting health campaign and health advocacy messages. Television programmes are always very expensive especially for those considering a low cost campaign, no immediate feedback especially with news programmes or documentaries, because they are always pre-recorded and there is no way to determine how the larger population or audience will absorb the message [9].

Public service announcement (news programmes): Most health communications are aired during prime time news programmes. In this way, the campaign about health conditions gets to the target audience within stipulated time. This applies to both television and radio stations. Example is the breaking news about the Monkey pox outbreak in Baylesa state and suspected persons on Rivers state.

Newsletter/journals: These are great way of creating awareness on health related issues. Newsletters are printed report containing information of activities or health problems and are sent by mails. They are always to be referred to in case of any doubt (www.Adoptahighway.com).

Bill boards/posters: They cover a great population. They serve as a great medium to cover health message. Messages on bill boards/posters give audience the opportunity to reach target audience on the move [10].

Social media/internet: The internet has brought us several new mainstream communications tools and changed the communication landscape. It is described as the communication revolution; internets have saved us time in creation and development of messages. Examples are e-mail, SMS, instant messaging (yahoo, MSN messages), video conferencing, face book, whatsapp, twitter and others (Merrian-webster.com).

Benefits of Health Communication

Health communication prevents and sustains healthy behaviour and makes clients /patients feel at ease. USAID [11] explained that high assessment to health care system is achieved through effective health communication. The utilization of behaviour change communication (BBC) activities by health communication increased the awareness about family planning, motivates individuals to seek services and help them to successfully use their contraception methods of choice. However Centre for Disease Control [12] stated that health communication increases audience knowledge and

awareness of any health related issues. Also, behaviours and attitudes are influenced towards health issues. Health communication demonstrates the benefits of behaviour changes to public health outcomes. It advocates a position on a health issues or policy. Health communication causes increase demand and support for health services as well as removal of misconceptions on health related issues.

Barriers of Effective Health Communication

Health communications also face some challenges like:

Low health literacy

There may be difficulty in understanding the message hence; literature should be used for impaction of knowledge.

Poor communication link

Hospitals are made up of different ethnic groups with socio-cultural differences, languages, religion and economic differences, thus affect communication link between the health workers and the communities.

Poor research

The developing countries find it difficult to carry out research. Therefore, to design, develop and implement health programmes becomes difficult.

Some barriers of health communications as identified by Achalu [3] are listed as follows:

- Wrong person sending messages.
- Lack of receivers.
- Unclear messages.
- Inappropriate channel.
- Inadequate feedback and noise distorting the message.

Conclusion

Health communication contributes to all aspects of disease prevention and promotion of health. It is relevant in number of contexts including the well-being of individuals and the communities. Health communication galvanizes people into action, promotes healthy lifestyle, prevents diseases and improves the health through eschewing destructive behaviour like abuse of substances (cigarette, drugs and alcohol), maintaining personal and environmental hygiene as well as cultivating a positive healthy sexual relationship. These will promote health and improve well-being.

Recommendation

Based on the importance of health communication on prevention of diseases and promotion of health, it is recommended that:

Health communication should be in co-operated in the curriculum of all levels of health institutions to equip health educators/providers with adequate knowledge concerning communications on health related issues.

Health education should stand as a discipline of its own.

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