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The role of the media in health awareness

PHD Djamila Ouchene

University of Bouira, Algeria

Email: dj.ouchene@univ-bouira.dz

PHD Hocine Boussalah

University of Bouira, Algeria

Email: h.boussalah@univ-bouira.dz

PHD Kheireddine Ziane

University of Algiers 2, Algeria

Email: kheireddine.ziane@univ-alger2.dz

Abstract---The media play an active role in disseminating health information and data to a wide audience. This information includes messages about disease prevention, treatment methods and the latest research and developments in the medical field. This awareness is conveyed through educational programmes, articles and awareness campaigns. In addition, the media can motivate individuals and communities to take positive steps to improve their health. This is particularly important at a time when misleading information is easily disseminated. In general, the media are a fundamental pillar in raising awareness of health issues by providing information, education, advocacy and promoting positive changes in the health behaviour of individuals and communities. However, this field faces several obstacles and factors that we will address in this article.

Keywords---media, awareness, health.

Introduction

Health literacy is a central dynamic on which health systems build their strategies to control various infectious and chronic diseases (ISHIKAWA & KIUCHI, 2010). Its aim is to provide citizens, especially patients, with skills and tools that enable them to control various health threats and risks through monitoring, prevention and treatment. The essence of health promotion is to reduce the medical, economic and social complications resulting from diseases and health problems. In order to improve the overall health of citizens and reduce treatment costs, health professionals and those involved in public health are focusing on equipping patients and citizens with the knowledge and skills necessary to manage health problems and cope psychologically, socially and

cognitively. Current health challenges require complex and long-term approaches involving changes in habits and behaviour and the ability to adapt to epidemic conditions that cannot be addressed by medical interventions and therapeutic drug programmes alone (KREUTER & M.MCCLURE, 2004).

1- The concept of health communication:

Health communication is a specialised branch of communication that targets a specific audience and addresses a specific area with the aim of raising awareness, educating, changing behaviour and even adopting new behaviours. Academically, it is considered a field of knowledge and a branch of communication studies that combines theory and practice in understanding communication processes and behaviour change. It is particularly important in times of crisis and public health threats such as disease and epidemics (HORNIK, 2002, p. 8). It works to provide the community with accurate news, sound health information, scientific facts and knowledge that contribute to the formation of a preventive and therapeutic health culture. It involves four elements: the sender, the receiver, the message topic and the communication medium (Ben Orns, 2010, p. 54).

Health communication contributes to the transfer of global experiences and the highlighting of health issues and medical practices for the purpose of acquiring knowledge and information. It provides recipients with relevant health information to broaden their knowledge horizons. It also deals with the health reality in all its dimensions by monitoring health achievements at the national, regional and international levels (Al-Dulaimi, 2015, p. 221).

The relationship between health education and the media is defined on two levels:

1. Cooperative level: The aim is to use the media to achieve the development of a culture of health and to introduce preventive health media programmes. The media produce health programmes and work to disseminate them among the population through various means. Health institutions, on the other hand, use the media to introduce their health activities and strengthen the preventive health culture in society.

2. Functional level: It refers to a communicative media policy that respects the ideology and culture of society by providing accurate news and promoting health values among individuals in the community. It is the communication strategy adopted by health institutions in the field of health education and works to achieve it in practice by aligning health programmes with societal health values and ethics (Ben Amroush, 2020, p. 688).

One of the main tasks of health communication is to achieve health literacy, which is the set of perceptions, beliefs and insights that guide a person's health life and determine their health behaviour. Health awareness consists of all the knowledge and beliefs we have about health issues and problems, bearing in mind that accurate knowledge is a collection of information, experiences and accumulated perceptions obtained from various sources about health facts and opinions. The importance of health literacy lies in the fact that it enables individuals to have a correct scientific perspective that helps them to interpret health phenomena, to search for the causes of diseases and to prevent them, and it serves as an intellectual asset that individuals can use to make informed

decisions about health problems they encounter. French researcher Jean Myriat sees medical content as knowledge content that includes ideas, data and statistics related to health or disease. This knowledge content works on the development of the recipient's knowledge with the aim of contributing to the increase of new medical knowledge, transferring it and making it accessible to those working in this sensitive sector (Amrar, 2020-2021, p. 67).

2- Elements of health communication:

To achieve the objectives of health communication in promoting health awareness and health culture, several essential conditions and elements must be met, including

***Accessibility:** The correct health message should be placed or presented where it is easily accessible to the audience. Placement may vary depending on the audience, the complexity of the message and its intended purpose.

***Balance:** Health content should present an appropriate balance of the benefits and risks of potential actions. It should also present different and accurate perspectives on the issue.

***Consistency:** It should be coherent and consistent with health information from different sources.

***Evidence base:** Relevant scientific evidence in the field of health that has been comprehensively reviewed and rigorously analysed should be used to guide practice, performance standards and criteria for review, evaluation and application in relation to telehealth.

***Reliability:** The source of health content should be trustworthy and reliable, and the content should be regularly updated.

***Repetition:** The delivery and accessibility of health content should be continuous over time to increase its impact on a given audience.

***Timing:** Health content should be presented or made available when the audience is most receptive or when they need specific health information.

***Comprehensibility:** The readability, language level and format of health content should be appropriate for the intended audience.

These elements contribute to effective health communication and the achievement of its objectives (Tebi, 2021, p. 176).

Based on the previous discussion, we can conclude that the main functions of health communication, which are not exclusive to the media in general, can be summarised as follows:

A. Educational function: Health communication helps to share global experiences and to highlight health and medical issues for learning and benefit. It educates people about healthy habits, dispels misconceptions and false attitudes, and promotes healthy behaviour. It also disseminates facts and ideas about diseases, their causes, transmission, diagnosis, prevention and treatment.

B. Awareness function: Health communication creates health awareness by informing people about the reality of health, warning them about the risks of epidemics and impending diseases, and educating different segments of society about the values of health and prevention. This has a positive impact on the community's health culture, leading to a reduction in the number of patients and visits to hospitals and medical centres, thus alleviating the increasing pressure on the health sector.

By raising individual awareness, disseminating knowledge and promoting a culture of health, health communication aims to:

- Improve the physical, mental and social health of individuals, families and communities by focusing on nutrition, housing, exercise, the environment, family planning and other factors that influence human health.
- Emphasise disease and accident prevention by helping individuals understand the practices and habits necessary to maintain and improve their health.
- Promote prompt and appropriate treatment when illness or injury occurs and ensure that treatment is sustained.
- Optimise the use of available health, medical, pharmaceutical, nutritional and social services for the benefit of the community.

C. Treatment function: Health communication aims to address health reality in all its dimensions in a transparent way. It raises important and critical health issues, draws attention to urgent health problems in society, and calls on experts and authorities to participate in solving them. It motivates professionals from different disciplines to work together effectively to solve these problems and to develop existing resources and capabilities, whether natural or financial. It also urges the government and organisations to take proactive and urgent actions and plans to prevent outbreaks and diseases in society. It also influences and alerts government to medical errors.

These functions of health communication are essential for achieving individual and community health development, which is necessary for comprehensive development based on physically and mentally healthy individuals. The transfer of global health experiences contributes to the advancement of scientific research in the field of health and encourages professionals to keep up with and benefit from therapeutic advances to improve their skills. The contribution of health communication in spreading health awareness and promoting a culture of health helps individuals to protect themselves from various diseases, thereby preserving their well-being and the public health of the community. Addressing and discussing health issues through media channels is an important way to identify errors and find solutions, which in turn contributes to reforming and developing the health sector and ultimately achieving comprehensive health and development (Touhami, 2017, pp. 304-305).

3. Barriers to health communication:

The development of health communication has seen tangible progress, similar to other forms of media and communication in the health field. It has gained a prominent position, contributing to the improvement of health and quality of life in society, both in terms of well-being and health development. However, health information is not static but subject to change as a result of advances in health, medical and pharmaceutical research. This variability can lead to misunderstandings by the media, by those involved in health communication as a whole, or by the general public and target audiences. The following observations can be made in this area:

Prominent contradictions occur in media coverage of health issues, where medical information is confused by the dissemination of inaccurate information. Such strategic errors can confuse public opinion and the target audience, thereby

undermining the credibility of the information and the media. Therefore, specialised health media sources are needed to ensure the accuracy of health information (Amrar, 2020-2021, p. 83).

Nermin Nabil Al-Azraq has identified a number of obstacles, based on her research into the coverage of health issues in Egyptian newspapers. These problems are source related and include:

- The fear of some sources to mention facts that could harm their colleagues, doctors, officials or experts in their positions.
- Lack of trust between the source and the journalist due to bad experiences with some journalists, especially those who lack professionalism.
- Difficulties in communicating with certain sources, especially in the private sector, such as officials in private hospitals and medical centres, who do not want to disclose any violations or misconduct, thus hindering the journalist's task.
- Other problems include the lack of sufficient financial support to cover health-related issues.
- Accurate scientific translation of medical terminology is a challenge for some journalists covering health issues in Egyptian newspapers, as they may not specialise in these scientific matters.
- One of the main problems in health journalism is the lack of in-depth analysis, which requires considerable effort, time and a broad vision that is often hampered by fragmented perspectives and lack of cooperation among editors.
- Professional frustration is a major issue that sometimes affects journalists in the health sector because important issues that have been carefully prepared over a long period of time may not be given front-page coverage or sufficient space because there may be other issues that are perceived as less important but which attract readers because of their sensational or unusual nature.
- Lack of knowledge about audience characteristics, priorities and needs due to a lack of scientific research on the public.

Although health issues are generally of interest to everyone, media organisations do not focus on conducting public opinion surveys or audience studies. They often rely on official sources, comparisons and reviews of studies to discover new information, but sometimes fail to adequately monitor audience trends and government priorities.

Based on the above, it becomes clear that the ethical duty in the light of social responsibility requires the journalist working in the field of health affairs to focus on the most serious and accurate health issues, those that are a source of concern to the majority of people, regardless of their age groups, geographical environments and others. The ethical duty also obliges journalists to verify everything they write and present to the public regarding health issues and related information and details. They should strive to provide successful models and effective solutions for everything that is really dangerous and important, and to give real priority to health issues and achieve practical benefits for the public (Nabil Azraq, 2020, pp. 1425-1426).

Using and activating the media in our societies is a fundamental step in addressing these situations and issues. It is vital for the media to keep abreast of events and shed light on these issues and problems as part of addressing them

and seeking ways to prevent or mitigate their spread. Media campaigns are an important means of transmitting information from the source to the target audience, in an attempt to change certain behaviours or attitudes, to raise awareness of a particular issue, or to promote certain policies and measures that are seen as potentially achieving certain goals for the benefit of the general public.

Conclusion

The social responsibility of the media in the field of health requires that information and news be provided to the public in an accurate and objective manner. This responsibility encompasses various aspects such as accuracy, diversity, fair representation, freedom and social participation, with the aim of promoting interaction and positive impact.

The dynamics of health awareness are not isolated from the societal challenges and health risks facing the community. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the fragile economic, social and environmental foundations of our world, necessitating the establishment of essential guidelines for health policy, with a focus on treatment and prevention protocols and reliance on an applied media plan using all media and communication channels.

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