

PERSPECTIVE

Engaging Media with Medical Institutions: Experience from Tertiary Hospital in Eastern India

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Abstract

Behaviour change is an important aspect of the successful implementation of any national health program. Social behaviour change among end-user can be possible by imparting the right information in the right quantity to the right audience, at frequent intervals through the proper medium. Mass media, both electronic and print are considered useful modes to deliver all public health-related messages to the people. However, the key is to provide correct information to the media for dissemination. On the other hand, medical colleges have a depth of knowledge on technical know-how but reaching a larger population is quite challenging. Therefore, a team approach should be planned by establishing a partnership between media and medical colleges and then the social behaviour change can be achieved in the desired direction. In lieu of this novel partnership, the Department of Community Medicine and Family Medicine, All India Institute of Medical Sciences Bhubaneswar had taken the initiative to bring together media personnel and faculty of medical colleges to chalk and roll out the behaviour change communication for nutrition interventions. This program was highly successful as the liaison helped disseminate the right information to the people. Also, the faculty and residents gained insight into dealing with media and thereby serving the community.

Keywords

Media; Medical college; Public Health Nutrition; Tertiary hospital

Introduction

Media plays a significant and crucial role in forming and influencing people's attitudes and behavior. It educates the public about health issues and has a responsibility to report accurate health information. In this age of digital revolution, it is highly pertinent

that the health professionals engage with media most effectively so that real messages, information and issues are appropriately highlighted. Health care professionals, particularly doctors, are usually busy in their professional work and at times hesitate in having an interaction with media.

In today's fast-paced world, healthcare professionals are engaging with media in a variety of ways. Mass media & social media are being utilized to enhance their services and provide patients with accurate medical information. Media when used cautiously provides obvious advantages such as professional networking, clinical education, and health promotion. However, when used unwisely, social media has its disadvantages; such as, violation of patients' confidentiality and privacy, flaring up unnecessary issues, misinformation, etc. which may lead to formidable consequences.

COVID-19 proves that the media's value is indispensable, which has been playing an important role in the COVID-19 response. The global pandemic has once again proved media's role as quintessential; from following every single step of the medial fraternity and developments with multiple stories, incessant headlines and continuous updates each day. Healthcare professionals and media have been on their toes along with the government machinery in containing the COVID-19 outbreak, promoting good behaviours on health & hygiene, breaking myths & misconceptions including stigmatization; thereby potentially, saving lives to the optimal.

Media & Healthcare

Media can be optimally used for bridging gaps and building trust between the health care professionals and the general population. Doctors can use media for providing updates on new technologies, answer questions on various topics, deliver generic pre- and post-operative care information, etc. Additionally, engaging with community radio predominantly in media dark areas gives an added advantage to reach out to the most vulnerable sections of the society. Another important area that may be extremely beneficial to the health care fraternity is to use media for comparing and improving quality by getting an insight into the services they offer and overall patient satisfaction. Using information readily available on social media provides healthcare organizations an opportunity to learn from patient reactions, evaluate the possibility of additional services and adjust accordingly.

Social media channels may also be used as part of the training process of health care professionals to make learning process more enjoyable and interactive. Social media gives participants the power to provide presenters with immediate feedback on training sessions. Organizations may use training videos and

materials to engage audiences to exemplify their innovative training processes. Microblogs provide the most dynamic and concise form of information exchange via social media by allowing users to post a large number of brief messages or updates over a short period.

Twitter and other social media platforms are also being utilised by healthcare professionals (1) to provide up-to-date information during procedures to fellow doctors or medical students. Although some treat these updates as a distraction in the operating room, others argue that it is an innovation and provides educational value that needs to be embraced. (2)

Media has also been extremely supportive of showcasing and taking ahead of the good practices/messages to the larger community which needs to be further leveraged in the form of social behaviour change communication.

Experience of media engagement with Medical college in Eastern India

In order to build confidence and conviction and to minimize false perceptions developed from fake news, it is highly pertinent to be able to develop a relationship of trust with media and keep sharing true information and knowledge. Therefore, as part of the visionary plan, steps were taken to engage media with medical colleges through a series of workshops. The state of Odisha, near the eastern coast with a 45 million population, has the third-largest scheduled tribe population. One of the major health issues in Odisha is the high prevalence of undernutrition among children, adolescents and women. Around half of the children are stunted and one-fourth of children suffer from acute malnutrition. (3,4) The prevalence of anaemia is high in women, adolescents and among under-five. (4) Despite the implementation of various nutrition-related interventions adopted by the Government, the biggest challenge lies in the partnership between all key stakeholders. Media is an important partner for bringing about Social Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) and the success of any health program. Therefore, media workshops were organized by the Resource Centre for Advancement on Public Health Nutrition (RCAPHN) cell under Dept. of Community Medicine & Family Medicine (CM & FM) of AIIMS Bhubaneswar to create a noble platform for the association between media and health institutes.

All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Bhubaneswar was established by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India in the year 2012. This Institute of National Importance has the vision to establish Centre of Excellence in medical education, training, health care and research with a commitment to serve the underserved. Resource Centre for Advancement of Public Health Nutrition cell has been established under the aegis of Dept. of CM & FM in partnership with UNICEF Odisha. The objective of the cell is to provide technical support to different departments and institutions for improving the nutritional status of Odisha.

Towards achieving this objective, AIIMS Bhubaneswar has been organizing media sensitization cum engagement workshops. Two such workshops have been completed showing an overwhelming response from the media houses and also from the medical fraternity, throwing open a roadmap on building trust to bridge gaps.

The first workshop held on 26th July 2019, was intended to sensitize media on the nuances of public health nutrition, situational analyses of various key indicators and how media can be gainfully engaged in taking ahead true positive stories to the general masses. Technical experts included faculty from the Dept. of CM & FM and officials from UNICEF Odisha. Experts emphasized on-going Public health nutrition interventions in the state and the role of media in showcasing the best practices. Faculty appealed to the media that they shouldn't share imaginary, negative issues to the public which hamper implementation of national programs. In the half-day workshop, technical materials on state nutrition scenario, success stories and best practices were shared. All the journalists from the electronic and print media who joined the workshop appreciated this innovative effort.

The second workshop on 'Creating an Enabling Environment for Constructive Association with Media' was held on 12th January 2020. The objective of the workshop was to strengthen the communication process between media & health professionals for highlighting the good practices and thereby lead to positive reporting. The session was graced by representatives of the media (print & electronic), Director, Institute of Mass Communication, Dhenkanal, Chairman of Community Radio Association of India, HoDs from the Dept. of Community Medicine of the 12 Medical

Colleges of Odisha, representatives from AIIMS, Bhubaneswar and UNICEF, Odisha.

Health professionals have the technical know-how on health-related issues from credible sources but they lack appropriate techniques for communicating with media and communities. On the other hand, journalists have the weapon and the right strategy for communication. So it was unanimously proposed that a team approach consisting of health professionals and media personnel should evolve and the medical colleges can take a lead in establishing such teams for the dissemination of vital and desired information to the general mass. The Dept. of Community Medicine in different medical colleges play a crucial role in terms of framing a roadmap for media engagement between health care professionals and the institutes across Odisha. It was also emphasised that various approaches need to be considered in reaching the media dark areas with correct information. The workshop amalgamated round table discussion and question-answer rounds and delved into the issues threadbare, to break the barriers and create positive meaningful engagement between the two most important and indispensable pillars of society.

These workshops have opened up a new horizon amongst media houses by creating more interest in networking with medical/public health professionals, leading to a win-win situation not only for media and the medical fraternity but also for the general masses at large.

Challenges & way forward

Most inaccuracies and speculations in news coverage can be attributed to several barriers between the medical community and the general public that include lack of knowledge by reporters, lack of time to prepare a proper report, and lack of space in the publication. In order to address these pertinent challenges, it is important to develop more such positive engagement with media, feed them with correct information & knowledge, tap media institutions for developing resources and nurturing a team of media professionals on the domain of public health nutrition. Further, collaboration may be done with AIIMS, Medical Colleges, UNICEF and core media houses (both print & electronic) including Community Radio Association on gainful engagement for regular dissemination of desired information. Each medical college/health institution may appoint a nodal person or Public Relations

Officer for engaging with media. This may prove to be beneficial in actual reporting and contain fake/biased reports.

Conclusion

In times of crisis, like the current COVID 19, the use of social media has undoubtedly increased to provide minute-by-minute information to the public. The Government has been using media, to deliver real-time updates on the number of positive cases, hospital capacity, medical status of patients and other precautionary measures to be followed by the citizens. However, the challenge of social behaviour change communication (e.g., social distancing, use of masks and hand hygiene for the prevention of COVID 19) constitutes essential for the success of any program. Therefore, media engagement in the right direction for sharing the right information at the right time, place and to the right population is the cornerstone of a healthy nation.

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