



HEALTH COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR HEALTH PROMOTION: A REVIEW

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Abstract: Health is wealth is a well known adage especially when it is effectively promoted with good strategies including communication. This paper reviewed health communication strategies for health promotion. The paper aimed at providing information regarding the concept of health, health promotion and health communication strategies. Health promotion involves enabling people have increased control over, and to improve health in order to live healthier lives. Living a healthier life therefore, may empower individuals and communities to modify their attitude to choose healthy behaviours and possibly minimize the risk of developing chronic diseases. The paper also reviewed the different levels of health promotion namely primary, secondary and tertiary levels of health promotion. The reported health promotion strategies includes medical approach, behavioural change, educational approach, client centered approach and societal change approach. The paper also looked at communication as a good medium of conveying health behavioural change in people especially if appropriate strategies are sufficiently applied. The identified communication strategies in expert reports includes; primary communication strategies, secondary communication strategies and tertiary communication strategies. The benefits of proper communication strategies for health promotion are also highlighted. The paper subsequently concludes that health communication is necessary in promoting the general well-being of the individual and the communities. In addition, the healthcare delivery system of a nation will be functional to the citizens if proper communication system is adopted. Based on that, it is recommended among others that efforts should be intensified in organizing community based enlightenment programmes on accepting modern health communication processes and also that proper utilization of resource materials should be intensified. Health communication should be incorporated into the health education curriculum at all levels of education in order to equip health educators/providers with adequate knowledge concerning communications and communication strategies on health related issues.

Keywords: Health, Health Promotion, Communication Strategies

Introduction

Health Defined

One of the several strategies for the promotion of all human activities including health is communication. Health is an amorphous word that lacks a single definition. To some, "health is wealth" -meaning that in the absence of good health, an individual or society cannot attain its full potential that is why Mahatma Gandhi validated 1948 definition of health by World Health Organization (WHO) asserts "It is health that is real wealth and not pieces of gold and silver, He was alluding to the idea that health is more

important than monetary wealth, and that a society cannot prosper unless its people are healthy.

"Health" is derived from an old English word, "hale", which means "wholeness, being whole or sound." Despite its origins, there are several etymological meanings and these definitions that have evolved over time. Early definitions focused on biomedical aspects: health was seen as the ability of the body to carry out its biological functions and any disruption in these functions was viewed as a disease. While these definitions have merit, their scope is limited. Perhaps the most established modern-day definition of health was provided by the World Health

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Organization (WHO) in 1948, as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. For the first time, domains of health beyond merely biomedical aspects were considered, emphasizing the importance of mental and social wellbeing. Consequently, Smith (2017), argues that this prerequisite for completeness could mean that many would be unhealthy most of the time. The author notes that the increase in the prevalence of chronic disease would mean that many with even minor long-term ailments would be persistently classified as being ill. According to the report, this need for "complete" wellbeing brings the risk of over-medicalization, redefining and treating conditions not previously identified as health problems, leading to individuals receiving unnecessary interventions.

Suresh (2013), saw health as "an ever-evolving state of mind, body, and relationships perceived by an individual, a family, a group or a community for self in a particular time, space and context. The author stresses that health is one's ability to live his dream, or a person's mental or physical condition. True health is the intersection of one's physical, mental, emotional, social, economic, and spiritual state of being at any one time (Huber, 2017). From these definitions and descriptions of health, it is therefore, necessary that every knowledge or information about health should be communicated to people hence Health Communication could be crucial in nature.

Health communication

Health Communication is an interdisciplinary, progressive and dynamic subject area of research, which is getting immense popularity because of its applicability and widely acceptance among health professionals and media communicators (Nishiuchi, Taguri & Ishikawa., 2016). Due to its wider acceptance among health, social, communication and data scientist, it has received attention of the researchers of various diverged field to collaborate for an in-depth and inclusive research (Stacey, James, Chapman, Courneya & Lubans, 2015). In that regard, various health communication models alongside with theories have emerged as key concepts are making this a trans-disciplinary area of research.

Most of the health researchers are working on health belief model, agenda setting for health awareness, multilevel

health education model, social learning theory, and social cognitive theory, the theory of planned behavior, the trans-theoretical model & diffusion of innovation for theorizing the research (Bullen & Roberts, 2018)

Health Communication mainly initiates a positive dialogue between health professionals, health communicators and media professionals with one aim: making echo for health rights, health belief, health education and health awareness at ground level (Starmann, Heise, Kyegombe, Devries, Abramsky, Michau & Collumbien, 2018). Health Communication discipline mainly aims to pump up public health campaigns to initiate health favourable rhetoric. The key strategy of the health communication is to inform the masses about health issues, challenges and opportunities particularly focusing on two approaches, mass media & interpersonal campaigning through health educators, health workers and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) (Glanz & Bishop, 2010).

The development of health communication for promoting health has mainly taken place outside the health care services. When health communication does occur within the health care services, it lacks a broad socio-ecological health promotion approach, needed to tackle lifestyle related illhealth and health inequalities. An ecological health promotion approach addresses socioeconomic and cultural factors that determine health as well as providing information and life skills to make appropriate health decisions. Such an approach includes both promoting health and preventing diseases (Ratzan, 2011).

The Article Base (2010), explains health communication' as the art and technique of informing, influencing and motivating individual, institutional and public audiences about important health issues. According to the report, health communication draws from numerous disciplines, including mass communication, speech communication, health education, marketing, journalism, public relations, psychology, informatics and epidemiology. In the opinion of Kreps and Neuhauser (2012), health communication is the art and technique of informing, influencing and motivating individuals, institutional and public audiences about important health issues. In their further explanation, the communication adopts a participatory approach whose main aim is empowerment through dialogue and mutual



learning; the process is as important as the outcome. They stated that the participatory communication could facilitate collaborative learning for both provider and receiver of health communication. In addition, health communication providers can learn about receiver's needs and preference for health communication through collaboration process; an insight that could enable them to construct health communication resources that is relevant and accessible to intended receivers. Likewise, receivers may gain more knowledge on health and health management as well as relationship between health and lifestyle through the same dialogue process. In a similar note, Mantoura and Potvin (2012), state that raising health literacy is important for sustainable health care services

. Improving health literacy is critical to empowerment because health literacy encompasses more than transmitting health information and developing skills. It entails improving people's access to health information and support capacity to use it effectively to make informed choices, reduce health risks and increase quality of life . It is against this background that Smith, Bratini, Chambers, Jensen and Romero (2010), point out that health literacy as an important public health goal to reduce inequity. Consequently, they identified creation of supportive environment, development of personal skills and reorienting health services as important action areas whose overarching goal is 'to create societal conditions to ensure good health, on equal terms, for the entire population. Montoya & Potvin (2012), opines that effective health communication is viewed as an increasing method of improving health services. The report further suggests that through proper health communication strategies with modern technology advancement in information and communication technology (ICT), there will be rapid changes in individual health attitudes and positive results in health development dynamics.

Other benefits of health communication show that it contributes to all aspects of disease prevention and health promotion, with special relevance in many contexts, such as the professional relation between physicians and patients, the search for health information, patients' compliance to the clinical recommendations, dissemination of information about health risks (Adeyemi,

2012). In other words, risk communication), educating consumers on how to access health services system, development of IT applications in healthcare. To this end Adeyemi recommends that information given to clients, patients and others should be planned to suit the needs of the people with different tools.

Different communication tools are often used as part of an effective communication plans and must serve its purpose. However, whichever communication strategies or plans adopted should be skillful to bring about positive change in behavior. Skillful strategies adopted in communication opens way for proper understanding of health issues that affect the people and calls for behavioural change. The importance of effective health communication to promote good health cannot be underestimated.

Communication strategies in health care system are basically a process of disseminating health information to individual in the community. However, communication generally, is to ensure effective accessibility and affordable health services to individuals who are regarded as beneficiaries (Akpabio, 2016). Most great nations in the world are what they are today due to effective health communication strategies. Health communication therefore, is recognized as a source of effective channels of bringing health information and other health services close to the community.

David (2014), observes that through effective health communication strategy, most people are properly informed on health issues especially when viewed within the perspective of accessibility and efficiency. The report also notes that the phenomenon of health communication has brought with it importance communication technology which is helpful in a wide range of health information.

Health communication prevents and sustains healthy behaviour and makes clients /patients feel at ease. Insel and Roth (2014), submit that high assessment to health care system is achieved through effective health communication. The utilization of behaviour change communication 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, the Centre for Disease Control and



Prevention (2013), states that health communication increases audience knowledge and awareness of any health related issues. Furthermore, 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 issue or policy. Health communication causes increase demand and support for health services as well as removal of misconceptions on health related issues. These outlined benefits of health communication perhaps prompted Kelly (2013), assertion that the prospect for better and efficient health care delivery system in Nigeria and in other parts of the developing nations of the world is depended on the level of health communication strategies.

Health communication strategy can be classified into two major aspects: verbal and non-verbal communication, on the aspects of verbal communication, it requires individual to be involved in physical contact or discussion, while non-verbal communication system does not actually involve physical contact or process of passing information on health issues. On a similar note, Daniel (2016), highlights that with effective communication strategy, social relations among individuals are enhanced which could involve passing of essential health information to individuals in a community. This also could mean that health communication may be excellent tool for health promotion.

Health promotion

Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve their health (World Health Organization, 2016).. Health promotion aims includes; to enable people to address health problems and lead healthier lives, to enable people to increase control over their own health, to engage and empower individuals and communities, to chose healthy behaviors and make changes that reduce the risk of developing chronic diseases and other morbidities, enhances the quality of life for all people, reduces premature deaths. By focusing on prevention, it reduces the costs (Both financial and human) that individuals, employers, families, insurance companies, medical facilities, communities, the state and the nation at large would spend on medical treatment

(World Health Organization, 2016). In what appears to be a direct response to this, Ewles and Simnett (2013), identify five approaches to health promotion, each necessitating the use of different kinds of activities namely: medical; behavioural change; educational; client-centred and societal change.

The medical approach aims to enable people to be free from medically defined disease and disability, such as infectious diseases, cancer and heart disease. The approach involves medical interventions to prevent or ameliorate ill health. Possibly using a persuasive paternalistic method, persuading for example middle age people to be screened for high blood pressure. This approach values preventive medical procedures and the medical profession's responsibility to ensure that patients comply with recommended procedures. The success of this approach however, may be dependent on the behaviour of the individual hence could be addressed using behavioural approach (Ewles & Simnett, 2013).

The behavioral change approach is based upon changing people's individual attitudes and behaviors so that they adopt a "healthy lifestyle". Examples include teaching people how to stop smoking, look after their teeth, eat the "right food", and so on. In this approach it is argued that a healthy lifestyle is in the best interest of individuals and health professionals promoting this approach will see it as their responsibility to encourage as many people as possible to adopt the healthy lifestyle they advocate. Perhaps, the educative approach could also be effective in achieving the set objectives (Ewles & Simnett, 2013).

The aim of the educational approach is to provide individuals with information, ensure knowledge and understanding of health issues, and to enable well-informed decisions to be made. Information about health is presented, and people are helped to explore their values and attitudes and to make their own decisions. Help in carrying out those decisions and adopting new health practices may also be offered. The educational approach encourages individuals to make their own decisions and at the same time health professionals will see it as their responsibility to raise with clients the health issues which they think will be in the client's best interests (Ewles & Simnett, 2013).



Within the client centered approach, the health professional works with clients to help them identify what they want to know about and take action on so that they make their own decisions and choices according to own interests and values. The role of the health professional is to act as a facilitator. They help people to identify their concerns and gain the knowledge and skills they require in making the changes happen. Self-empowerment of the client is seen as central. Clients are valued as equals. They have knowledge, skills and abilities to contribute, and they have an absolute right to control their own health destinies (Ewles & Simnett, 2013).

Rather than changing the behavior of individuals, the societal change approach modifies the physical and social environment in order to make it more conducive to good health. Those using this approach will value their democratic right to change society, and will be committed to putting health on the political agenda at all levels and to the importance of shaping the health environment instead of shaping the individual lives of people who live in it (Ewles & Simnett, 2013). Health promotion, however, encompasses the process in which people are enabled to take control of certain factors that have an effect on their health in order to improve it. (Airhihenbuwa and Obregon, 2012).

Through a set of concepts and various strategies are essential guides to addressing major challenges faced by developing nations. According to Airhihenbuwa and Obregon (2012), these challenges include; communicable and non-communicable diseases and other issues related to human and health development. The report further states that the process of health promotion is targeted towards people taking action and rightly explains why health promotion is not done on people but rather, it is something done by people for individuals or groups. In their opinion, Atkin and Rice (2013), state that health promotion is a very powerful and relevant strategy for social development. Mainly, it is a vital set of strategies that are meant to address issues influencing unequal differences in health. The writers submit that it also covers certain principles that fall beneath a set of strategies meant to promote conditions and allow people to stay healthy and be able to make healthy decisions. This means that health

promotion improves the health status of individuals, families, communities, states and the nation at large. Health promotion comes under three levels of prevention to includes ; primary, secondary and tertiary levels of preventions.

Primary health promotion. (Prevention stage) entered mainly on educating people to practice some of the preventive behaviors, such as having a balanced diet in order to protect themselves from developing diseases in the future, and practice those preventive measures that comes before the onset of illness or injury and before the disease process begins. Examples include immunization and taking regular exercises to prevent health problems developing in the future (Achelu, 2011)

Secondary health promotion. (Intervention stage) aims to educate people to visit their local health center when they experience symptoms of illness, such as fever, so they can get early treatment for their health problems. These measures could lead to early diagnosis and prompt treatment of a disease, illness or injury hence limiting disability, impairment or dependency and prevent more severe health problems developing in the future (Achelu, 2011).

Tertiary health promotion. (Rehabilitation stage) This is to educate people to take their medication appropriately and find ways of working towards rehabilitation from significant illness or disability (Achelu, 2011). Having knowledge of health promotion is vital to every individual. However, without effective communication strategies, it may not be fully realized by the individual or groups.

Health Communication Strategies

Information dissemination programmes methods make 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 (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). 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. It is in that perspective that CDC (2013), suggests that in transmitting information, it



is important to maintain consistency in the aesthetic appearance, linguistics style, tone and messages. Against this background, Noar, Benac and Harris (2017), identify various health communication strategies to include ; campaigns, entertainment advocacy, media advocacy, new technologies and inter personal communication, seminars, workshops.

One of the basic roles of health education in adopting health communication strategies is to adequately translate scientific language into an understandable information on health and other related issues in the society. According to Daniel (2016), the health information is usually disseminated through proper channels of communication which usually address diverse audience in various settings. The health educator is basically to formulate and support rules, policies and legislation on health issues in a community. However, it is the responsibility of health educators to design health programmes that will be sent to the community for the purposes of creating awareness on any developmental changes. In that regard, David (2014), submits that to effectively carry out any health programme, health education instruction strategies should be adopted at every stage of developmental process.

Health communication process cannot be separated from any health education programmes which suggest that health communication process is perceived to be relevant in general public and at various workplace, religious settings, markets, communities through their leaders. These are the target audience where health communication activities are displayed at the level of implementation. Implementation of health education programmes cannot be successfully carried out alone without the utilization of proper channels of effective communication processes. Consequently, Adeyemi (2012), report points out that effective communication processes will enable health educators to develop wide range of educational methods and techniques that will change the behaviour, habit, and practices of individuals within the society. Health informers adopt various means and strategies to pass any relevant health information through an organized means of

communication. For instance, in the new global dispensation, health information could be sent across to people through lectures, seminars, workshops, leaflets, posters and other instructional resources that could be developed in a simple and concise way that the people will understand. However, all these approaches will be possible if there is an understanding between the government of the day and health workers.

Health care delivery system in Nigeria and in other developing nations of the world will trigger well if proper health communication system is adopted. However, ensuring successful implementation of health policies require planning and making sure that various types of health personnel are put in place for the purposes of ensuring the full utilization of health communication strategies. For our health centers and other health institutions to be virile, appropriate measures should be put in place by ensuring that modern forms of communication system and facilities are replaced. This development may go a long way in making sure that our health care services are functional, relevant, accessible and affordable for all and sundry. Health communication campaigns is inevitable in every society

Health communication campaign directly provides education to people who are expected to adopt or change to a healthier behaviour. This campaign achieves large audience and influences the population to maintain and improve their health status (Centre for Rural Health, 2015),. This assertion also received the attention of Insel and Roth (2014), which state that it is a fact to be considered in the people health literacy. That is knowing if the people are knowledgeable about the risky health behaviour. The health educators consider the accessibility of the internet, media exposure as well as the cultural competency of the target population. The authors further, note that development of materials such as brochures, bill boards, radio commercials, television broadcast, newspaper articles, public service announcement, newsletter, pamphlets, videos, digital tools, case studies, group discussions, health fairs, field-trips and workshops help to increase, influence social norms,



increase availability of support or improve their health conditions (Centre for Rural Health, 2015). Health communication strategies comes under primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

Primary Health Communication Strategies

Primary health 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. Examples include; children immunization, political sensitization and others. Examples of traditional communication are town crier, age grade meetings and many more. Town crier 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 is another effective approach utilized to reach community members on health related issues. Various groups have specific days/months for meetings and can therefore, create an avenue for health educator to give her health related messages (Centre for Rural Health, 2015).

Secondary Health Communication Strategies

Secondary health communication strategy focuses on educating audiences on health topics such as HIV transmission or suicide prevention. It combines different learning experiences that inform people about health issues so they can take action. Health education can take place in a variety of environments. Schools may incorporate a suicide awareness campaign that includes a curriculum involving speakers telling personal stories, as well as lessons about depression warning signs and resources for help. In addition, doctors' offices might give out pamphlets

about colon cancer, or dentists' offices might play videos about proper dental hygiene. In all of these cases, the information helps in bringing awareness to the audience and preparing people to make healthier choices (Centre for Rural Health, 2015).

Tertiary Health Communication Strategies

Tertiary health communication strategies involves broadcast media 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 literally is achieved through health communication. It explains medical jargons, ill-informed messages and corrects general educational gaps. Radio programmers are less expensive than most television programmes hence a great choice for low cost budget. Large number of audience turns and listens to their radios every day. Unlike Television, most radio stations are mobile and are designed to gauge audience response (Centre for Rural Health, 2015). 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 (Centre for Rural Health, 2015).

Public service announcement (news programmes): Most health communications are aired during prime time news programmes. In this way, the campaign about health conditions get to the target audience within stipulated time. This applies to both television and radio stations. Example is the breaking news about the Monkey Pox out-break in Bayelsa State and suspected persons in Rivers State. Newsletter/journals: These are great ways of creating awareness on health related



issues. Newsletters are printed report containing information of activities or health problems and are sent by mails. Bill boards/posters: They cover a great population and serve as a great medium to cover health messages. Messages on bill boards/posters give the health educator the opportunity to reach targeted audience on the move (Centre for Rural Health, 2015).

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. In the same vain, Centre for Rural Health (2015), confirms the tertiary health communication strategies to include; Radio, Televisions, Newspaper, Flyers, Brochure, Internet and Social Media. Furthermore, Rural Health Information Hub (2017) expresses that effective Health information communication strategies include; use of Research Based Strategies. In this approach, the peoples' cultures, setting and languages are given priorities while wisdom is applied to archive it.

The benefits of proper communication strategies for health promotion cannot be underestimated with respect to the well-being of an individual, groups, communities and the nation at large . Adequate communication strategies therefore, contribute to all levels of disease prevention and promotion of health by making sure that vital information is transmitted to the health audience in due time and through proper channels. Health care delivery system in Nigeria and the world at large will function well if proper health communication system is adopted and health information are given through health education and the health educators as the "Town crier".

Conclusions

Health care delivery system in Nigeria and in other developing nations of the world will trigger well if proper health communication system is adopted. However, in ensuring successful implementation of health policy in Nigeria communities, it requires planning and making sure that various types of health

personnel are put in place for the purposes of ensuring full utilization of health communication strategies. Therefore, for our health centers and other health institutions to be virile, all the modern forms of communication system and facilities should be replaced. This development may go a long way in making sure that our health care services are functional, relevant, accessible and affordable for all and sundry.

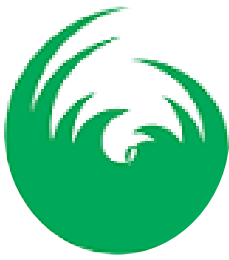
Health communication contributes to all aspects of disease prevention and promotion of health. It is relevant in number of contexts including the well-being of individuals and the communities. Health communication galvanizes people into action, promotes healthy lifestyle, prevents diseases and improves 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.

Recommendations

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

1. Proper utilization of resource materials should be intensified. 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.
2. Efforts should be made to create an enabling environment for the dissemination of health information across to the recipients using the identified health communication strategies.
3. Organizing community based enlightenment programmes on health is crucial to acceptance of modern health communication processes.
4. Health educators who are professionally trained should be encouraged to always adopt various health communication strategies in disseminating health information at all levels of government.

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