

Strategies for Developing a Health Promotion Campaign

BY LOTI POPESCU AND DANIEL VERMAN

Health education, an essential part of promoting public health policy, offers the opportunity to work directly for and with people from a community to change the perceptions and beliefs of individuals. Health promotion strategies are more successful if there is strong communication and collaboration between public health educators, government officials, members of a community, and the mass media. Drawing on experiences from the Constanta (Romania) Health Promotion and Health Education Department's "Living Healthy" campaign, this article discusses the creation and dissemination of clear, effective, and relevant public health messages, one aspect of health education.

Identify the Behavior You Want to Change

Prior to beginning a public health campaign, it is important to have reliable data that can be analyzed to determine the needs of a community. Because the Constanta Health Promotion and Health Education Department is part of the Constanta Health Directorate, the department has access to health statistics and is able to monitor the health level of the community. Gathered data help determine what health issues need to be addressed to improve the health status of all community members based on real versus perceived needs within the community. Being able to monitor

the health level of the community may also provide feedback on the success of campaigns and allows for reaction to trends as they occur.

After identifying a series of indicators that suggested that the overall health of the community needed to be addressed, a set of projects designed to promote a



Daniel Verman, right, and "Together in Health" technical staff prior to a broadcast.

Photo courtesy of Daniel Verman.

healthy lifestyle was created. "Living Healthy" is based on the belief that you can positively influence the behavior of individuals and get them to lead healthier lives. However, to influence behavior, you must first be able to effectively communicate ideas about healthy lifestyles through a community health promotion campaign and reinforce that information through existing resources.

Stress a Team Approach

To run a successful health promotion

campaign, the health promotion planners must be committed to the team concept and communicate effectively within the team. Everyone must participate in and bring his or her own experiences—as well as the knowledge of other community experts—to the project, while also working to create a confident atmosphere in which each member knows he or she has something to learn from the other members.

Interpersonal communication between team members is essential because it provides immediate feedback about ideas, messages, and practices. At the same time, it helps develop momentum that results in action. Achieving an open dialogue between members of the health promotion team is also a good starting point for fostering positive interactions with your target groups, as well as with government officials and the media. Ongoing contact with local authorities and community members is vital to achieving health promotion goals, and the media is an effective vehicle to reach the whole community.

Develop and Communicate Your Message

A clear message is the essential component of a good communication strategy, and successfully getting it out requires collaboration with newspapers, magazines, and television and radio stations. The media represent a cost-effective and efficient way to spread your message throughout the entire community because each segment of the media penetrates into the population in many and multiple ways. Press releases, press conferences, and interviews are some of the ways to get the media interested in your message.

Create Clear and Attractive Messages

Communication is about human interrelations; it incorporates learning processes, cooperation, education, and negotiation. Effective messages are

- attractive—they present new and interesting ideas in visually appealing or eye-catching ways;
- accessible—clear, logical, and concise;
- acceptable—relative to community norms;
- targeted—addressing a specific group; and
- convincing—so that people are motivated to change.

With health messages, we indirectly touch upon faith, personal beliefs, emotions, feelings, and attitudes. Therefore we must be sensitive to what we say and be vigilant about correctness of the information given to and transmitted by the media.

Continuously Reinforce Your Message

Like any good advertising campaign—be it for a new brand of soda or STD prevention—you want members of the community to keep hearing and reading your public health message. Since it is through continued exposure that people take notice of issues, it is essential that you broadcast your messages frequently. Public health campaigns should integrate catchy, brief messages like those found on billboards with substantive materials, such as newspaper articles that go into more detail and explain why, for instance, adopting a healthy lifestyle is a good thing to do. In addition to providing the community with healthy lifestyle messages, it is also important to offer information regarding medical facilities and other available resources so that they can follow up on any health concerns they might have.

Promote Community Interaction

Each media outlet offers a way for the

community to interact directly with medical specialists to increase their knowledge. Live call-in radio or television shows that provide immediate answers to questions and concerns are one option. Newspaper or magazine columns that give answers to questions sent in by citizens not only provide a means for getting people involved, they also represent the best option for addressing those health questions about which the community is most concerned. Exploit the particular characteristics of each media type to reach your targeted populations.

Rely on Health Experts to Answer Questions

When promoting a “message” or answering questions about health, it is important to use the expertise of medical and other professionals to communicate facts. Health promotion specialists increase the confidence citizens have in the message. They also promote the idea that knowledge is accessible and that community members should feel comfortable asking questions about preventive care at medical facilities.



Daniel Verman, former AIHA Program Officer Terry Richardson, Prasaad Steiner (University of Louisville), and Elona DeGooyer (Humana Inc.) of the Constanta/Louisville partnership prepare for a live television show.

Photo courtesy of Daniel Verman.

Affect Government Policy

Remember that media campaigns reach government officials as well as the general public. Thus, they are a way of keeping local authorities informed about and sensitized to health concerns. Media cam-

paigns affect public opinion, which in turn generates greater pressure for behavior change at all community levels, in terms of personal behaviors, public policy, and legislation.

Examples of Media Strategies

Since people get their information from different sources, it is important to adopt strategies that rely on multiple media channels. For instance, you do not want to work only with newspapers, because many citizens rely on radio or television for their news and don't read papers. The Constanta Health Promotion and Health Education Department has been successful in its “Healthy Living” campaign and has employed multiple media vehicles through which it reaches the community.

Use Television and Radio to Advance Health Awareness

The department produces “Together for Health,” a talk show that focuses on health and is broadcast through the local TV station, MTC. The show airs weekly during a

high audience hour. This TV talk show, the only one at the Constanta county level, addresses those health issues that are perceived to have a high level of interest in the community. It is mostly dedicated to preventive care *continued on page 29*

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and health education issues such as domestic violence, STD prevention, decreasing alcohol and drug consumption, smoking cessation, and healthy lifestyles. The TV guests, who are specialists from different medical areas, answer questions posed by TV viewers. In this way, the media helps the department to efficiently provide immediate health information to community members.

With the help of “Radio Constanta,” the department has developed a daily radio broadcast called “The Doctor’s Advise,” which focuses on prevention methods for different diseases. At the same radio station, every Saturday the department broadcasts a live, 30-minute interactive (call-in) show on drug consumption and HIV prevention.

Printed Media as Promoter

The department also runs a daily column called “Health is the Best” in the local journal *Cuget Liber (Free Thinking)*. The column is dedicated to preventive care and health education and promotion issues such as family planning methods and prevention of STDs, communicable diseases, obesity, cardiovascular disease, HIV/AIDS, and domestic violence. Readers of the newspaper have the opportunity to send in and receive answers to

questions about health problems from medical specialists.

Just as the department uses collected data to help determine which public health areas should be addressed through health education programs, the department also uses the media to research and obtain opinions from community members about their health concerns. Research results are often a starting point for additional health promotion and education activities. Thus, those people working in the media become healthcare collaborators as well as reporters.

The success of such strategies can be seen in the fact that in the last year, the local journal *Cuget Liber* increased in circulation and listening/viewing rates for the hours the radio and TV shows are broadcast went up, meaning the audience receiving Constanta’s public health messages has grown.

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