Chapter 1
To Be, or Not to Be Healthy:
A Question of Communication!

Célia Belim
ISCSP, University of Lisbon, Portugal

ABSTRACT

This chapter, as the starting point of the book, (re)constructs the substantive setting and puzzle of health communication, being a reflection and discussion based on the literature review on fundamentals and practices of health communication and the contributions and implications of informative and persuasive messages and communication practices to health. The literature review results show the essential role that communication has assumed in the context of health, having several positive effects, such as the treatment effectiveness, the improvement of the therapeutic relationship and health literacy, the penetration of certain health issues in the public agenda. It has also highlighted the need to strengthen and rethink, in the name of individual and social well-being, the relationship between health and communication. Particularly, in the therapeutic relationship, the need for the health professional to have adequate communication competences to interact with patients is emphasized. Additionally, the media prove to be a versatile tool in the achievement of health promotion aims.

INTRODUCTION

Communication "keep us healthy" (Floyd, 2011, p. 4) and has been described as an art and a science (Perkins, 2010), a key (Belim & Almeida, 2018), power (Sugai, Deptula, Parsa & Parsa, 2013), a solution or panacea (Samuel, 2016) for health. The literature is consensual on the contribution of health communication. It has been reported the need for communication to improve health outcomes and to promote well-being. For example, health communication, when delivered effectively in mass-mediated contexts, "has considerable potential to promote the health" (Ahmed & Bates, 2013, p. 4) and to shape general understandings (p. 3).

The role of communication is also highlighted by physicians from the earliest stages in their training in medical school (Sugai et al., 2013). There is an art behind delivering information to patients and this topic has been reported on extensively in the literature. For example, the importance of patient communication in surgery is "paramount" and is not only a means of educating the patient, but it is also a way of preserving a patient's well-being after a surgical procedure (Sugai et al., 2013). Mazor et al. (2012) discover that, of the 93 patients who experienced problems with their cancer treatment, 44 (47%) reported communication breakdowns, including fundamental problems in information sharing, emotional support, and care coordination. The authors postulate that effective communication between patients and clinicians can prevent lapses in quality and, when problems occur, can mitigate harm and restore trust.

On the other hand, although the mechanisms of media effectiveness are not entirely understood, "the media play a vital role in assuring the health of the public in the twenty-first century" (Institute of Medicine US Committee on Assuring the Health of the Public in the 21st Century, 2002). Snyder (2001), in a series of meta-analyses, observes that media messages about health can create about 8% of the behavior change. Studies have shown that media effectiveness depends, among other factors, on the health objective to be achieved. Media communication creates more change when promotes the adoption of new behavior (prevention of HIV-AIDS) than when attempts to change addictive behaviors (tobacco or alcohol use). Flynn et al. (1992, 1994) discover that media campaigns, combined with other strategies such as school smoking prevention programs, are effective in changing behavior.

Ahmed and Bates (2013) argue that these mass-mediated messages are more likely to be successful in affecting health knowledge, attitudes, behavior,

24 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/to-be-or-not-to-be-healthy/286822

Related Content

Trauma and the Indexicality of the Missing Sign: Redaction of the Oral Mishnah as a Sign of Trauma
Joel West (2021). *International Journal of Semiotics and Visual Rhetoric (pp. 72-82).*
www.irma-international.org/article/trauma-and-the-indexicality-of-the-missing-sign/272970

The Dialogues of Bernie Madoff's Ponzi Fraud: An Exploration of the Discourses of Greed, Cliques, Peer Pressure, and Error
Joel West (2017). *International Journal of Semiotics and Visual Rhetoric (pp. 47-55).*
www.irma-international.org/article/the-dialogues-of-bernie-madoffs-ponzi-fraud/183640

Race and Cultural Taboo: Refugee Disaster Vulnerability and Resilience
Ming Xieand Chin-Chung Chao (2022). *Handbook of Research on Communication Strategies for Taboo Topics (pp. 104-125).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/race-and-cultural-taboo/300969

Influence of Corporate Social Media in Strategic Decision Processes
S. Venkataramanand Ranjan Das (2018). *Media Influence: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice (pp. 248-269).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/influence-of-corporate-social-media-in-strategic-decision-processes/192624

Case Study of The BizNest: The World's First Immersive Sitcom
Eve Weston (2020). *Handbook of Research on the Global Impacts and Roles of Immersive Media (pp. 176-199).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/case-study-of-the-biznest/248220