

7.I. Workshop: Storytelling - A powerful tool for infectious disease prevention

Chairs: Karl Ekdahl, ECDC, Aura Timen, Netherlands

Organised by: ECDC, EUPHA (IDC), RIVM

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Storytelling has been recognized as an effective tool for health communication and advocacy. Whereas health science has a focus on data and evidence, storytelling seeks to generate interest, engage audiences and convey information on complex issues based on evidence in a readily accessible manner. Combining facts and values into narratives can enhance understanding of an issue, and engaging stories give voice to the experiences of real people. Furthermore, in the context of diminishing trust in authoritative advice, some audiences may rely more on personal stories that convey authenticity and personal connection when receiving and acting upon health related information.

The key aspects that this workshop will look into are: What is storytelling in the context of public health practice? How can

it be applied for effectively communicating health enhancing messages? Which are the different approaches and areas of public health where it is being applied? How is it being used for health promotion and in combination with multilevel interventions? The workshop seeks also to present examples from practice, to showcase how storytelling is being applied in communicating about specific diseases. The focus of the workshop will be storytelling in support of preventive activities with respect to communicable diseases and vaccination.

The workshop also aims to share information on the skills and resources that are needed for the effective use of storytelling in public health practice, as well as information on capacity building initiatives. The challenges and caveats of using storytelling and the areas where further research is needed will also be highlighted.

The session is foreseen to have 3 speakers representing the following entities:

- Inspirational speaker/academia/practitioner – Keynote, introduction to the topic
- Academia/disease expert – Perspectives from the area of immunisation programmes
- Research centre/health communication practitioner – Perspectives from the area of communication on immunisation

Key messages:

- What is the value of storytelling in public health practice and how can it support effective communication interventions related to communicable diseases?
- How is storytelling being applied in communication interventions to address specific disease prevention challenges, and why has it been regarded as an effective practice in these contexts?

Storytelling makes public health statistics more accessible

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In public health it is no longer sufficient to rely solely on statistics and the rationality of our health message. Information about health issues has to compete with thousands of other communication messages. If the attention of our target audience is to be caught and held, especially when that audience is low literate or not yet interested in health issues, other, more emotionally appealing and popular communication methods need to be brought into play.

Using storytelling for health is also known as the entertainment-education (EE) strategy. Integrating health issues in popular media formats such as drama series, theatre or music, makes health issues more accessible for specific audiences. Stories can give a voice to people's own experiences and connect knowledge to action. For health communication to be effective, it is however essential that stories are realistic and credible to the audience, in the sense of 'true to life characters'.

With a rapidly changing media landscape we see that public health and communication professionals make use of both traditional media (television, radio, print) and new media (internet and digital media). Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, blogs) have become an integral part of the daily lives of our audiences. This creates an unique opportunity to make public health more participatory and more 'public'. It also requires a collaboration with new classes of online professional storytellers and creatives, serious game designers, social influencers and community owners. How can storytelling in traditional and new media contribute to engage and empower publics? What skills and competencies does it require to effectively use storytelling in public health communication? Martine Bouman will share her experience and research on the storytelling, the entertainment-education strategy and on creating a crossover between public health and the creative media industry.

Introduction of new vaccines: How can storytelling help?

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The introduction of a new vaccine into immunisation programmes may benefit from combining facts from what is known about the disease and the newly developed vaccine with storytelling techniques describing why vaccination against the disease is needed. The presentation will describe why preparing carefully for the introduction of a new vaccine can be crucial for the success of the immunisation programme.

Preparations should start with informing the healthcare professionals, key to the success of any vaccination programme. In this context, the term 'unpacking vaccine hesitancy among health care workers' has been coined. It makes reference to the challenges that arise if the healthcare professionals think that the vaccine is ineffective or even unnecessary; if this is the case, then they will not recommend others to be vaccinated. Healthcare professionals need to know facts about the disease for which the vaccine is offered, vaccine safety, vaccine efficacy and if available vaccine effectiveness and whether herd protection will play a role in reducing the impact of the disease.

The person to be vaccinated or their families also need all the facts, but may also benefit from informative storytelling where the disease and its possible complications are described, as well as the possible risks with vaccination. Although benefit-risks of vaccination have been assessed by trained regulators, each individual taking the decision to be vaccinated weighs the benefit-risk from a different perspective and needs guidance.

The history of vaccinology is full of examples of how new vaccines were embraced or not by healthcare workers and the population to be vaccinated. The knowledge on how to best communicate was limited when the first immunisation programmes were born. Successful and less successful examples will be presented, including the introduction of vaccines against smallpox, measles, invasive bacterial disease due to *Haemophilus influenzae* type b, and human papilloma virus.

Film and video as 'evidence' in a post-fact society

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Emotions over experts is trending in the popular media. Moreover, if the public health community wants to reach its public(s), it will need to update the usual modes of message pushing and move more into understanding the emotions and experiences of its audience to influence health behaviours. 'Take this, it is good for you' and other prescriptive modes of health communication are less and less welcome in a new world of horizontal over vertical communication.

This presentation will examine film and video stories that present powerful health narratives, both in terms of characterizing and understanding risks – and risk perceptions – as well as motivating positive health behaviours. Compelling personal stories around vaccines and vaccine preventable diseases will be the focus, but relevance to other health issues interventions will also be discussed.