



# Contemporary Relevance of Health Communication: A Perspective

**\*Shwetha M.Hans**

\* Research Scholar, Department of Studies in Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Mysore, Manasagangotri, Karnataka, India

## Preamble

Health is indeed the true wealth of the people. The health management and promotion have gained significance in modern times in the context of Sustainable Development Goals. The process of health management becomes incomplete in the absence of health communication. It basically includes information, education and communication of health centric policies, programmes and allied measures. Health communication is an important component of health management in modern times. Health communication is the practice of communicating promotional health information in the form of education, training, orientation and campaigns which benefit the mankind. The contemporary relevance of health communication is emphasized in this article based on qualitative research methodology.

## Concept of Health Communication

Health communication is a term commonly used and referred to by health professionals and communicators across the globe. Health communication is indispensable in achieving individual and collective health in modern society. There is no single acceptable definition of health communication which is normally perceived as an instrument of changing attitudes and behavioral patterns of people toward attaining better health status through adoption of health innovations and practices which are tested and tried.

The Alma-Ata Declaration (1978) emphasized the need for individual and community participation in the process of health communication. It has provided meaningful concepts and practices for the benefit of the mankind. There was a paradigm shift from prevention of disease to promotion of healthy life styles of the people. Health communication is required to increase knowledge and to reinforce desired attitudinal and behavioral patterns among the people regarding the health management of individuals and communities.

Health communication is the process by which individuals and groups of people learn to behave in a manner conducive to the promotion, maintenance or restoration of health. Scholars have provided a new perspective on health communication on the basis of practical experience. Health education is the part of health care that is concerned with promoting healthy behavior.

Health communication is a process that informs, educates and persuades the people to adopt and maintain healthy practices and lifestyles which enhance the capacity of the people. It also advocates environmental changes and enables the people to adapt themselves to the changing environment in the interest of health and wellness. Thus, health communication encompasses all strategies and activities which are meant of the attainment of better health status of the people.

Health communication is the translation of what is known about health into desirable individual and community behavior patterns by means of an educational process, according to NIHAIE (1989). Health communication is a combination of learning opportunities and teaching activities which are designed to enhance health knowledge and facilitate adaptation of behavior by the people.

### **Health Communication Planning**

Health communication is planned by the health professionals, health communicators and practitioners in accordance with the needs of the people (Shanmugam, 1981). The various stages of health communication planning are as follows.

1. Identifying the health problems and health needs,
2. Understanding the communication resources and requirements in tune with the health project,
3. Identification of the priorities,
4. Setting communication goals,
5. Assessment of communication resources,
6. Mobilization of communication resources,
7. Planning communication activities,
8. Implementation of communication plans,
9. Monitoring and evaluation of communication programmes and
10. Reassessment of the communication programmes.

Health organizations are required to develop a bandwagon of health communicators at various levels in order to reach out to the people who are under-privileged from health management point of view. The intervention of communications media becomes imperative in modern society which depends on the health of the people.

### **Relevance of Health Communication**

Communication media have a responsibility of promoting health communication in modern society. Especially the broadcast media have played a significant role in promoting health awareness among the people (Nuguid, 1985). The radio has become an effective medium of health communication in the rural and urban areas through broadcasting of special audiences programme. Health communication is

essential to persuade people to accept health innovations and best practices (Kreps, 1988). Interpersonal and mass communications are the principal sources of health communication. There is a need for proper coordination among the consumers, providers and administrators.

Mass media health campaigns are necessary to create awareness among the masses about healthy lifestyles. The media health campaigns constitute an important aspect of health management (Backer et al., 1992). Health professionals and media specialists should jointly design the disease specific health communication campaign for the benefit of society. Certain prejudices and biases have limited the effectiveness of health care delivery in modern society. Communication gaps between consumers and providers of health care have impeded health management (Kreps, 1996). Appropriate communication strategies are necessary to improve modern health care system and quality of health communication.

Interactive and persuasive communications are more useful than formal mass communication from health communication point of view. The convergence of computer, telecommunication and televisual technologies has improved the status of health communication. Health communication professionals need systematic training and orientation on the strategic health communication management. Health communication has emerged as a prominent branch of mass communication in the world. Health communication is practiced on the basis of certain criteria and guidelines (Kreps et al., 1998). Health communication inquiry and education should be subjected to scientific evaluation in order to improve the relationship between the service providers and beneficiaries.

The Internet is rapidly and radically transforming many aspects of society including healthcare services. Interactive health communication has gained significance in modern society. Internet has become the principal source and resource of health communication for health educators, health professionals, health policy makers, health communicators and general public.

Media advocacy is required to change personal attitudes and behaviors of the people. A wide range of grassroots community groups, public health leadership groups, public health and social advocates and public health researchers have used media to change the attitudes and behaviors of people and bring about social change that would influence health (Wallack et al., 1999). Media advocacy is necessary to link public health and social problems to inequities in social arrangements. It is part of a broader strategy for better public health management in modern society.

Internet has become a valuable tool for health education professionals in modern society. It is extensively used as channel of health communication (Bernhardt and Hubley, 2001). Internet has a significant impact on health education, research and practice in the world. Modern public health professionals primarily depend on the new media application for better professional and social connectivity development in the health sector. Websites have become highly accessible and effective digital sources and resources of health communication. Communication skills and competence of health professionals, health communicators and beneficiaries of health services should be enriched through informal training and orientation.

Revolutionary changes in health management and communication services have enhanced the scope of health communication research. It should be developed to promote public health literacy, health information quality, health message design and health delivery system in modern times (Kreps, 2001). Public health information management has become an important branch of health administration (Brashers et. al, 2002). Cross-cultural considerations and information management goals have significant association in modern health management sector. Multi-media application has the power to revolutionize the health information management.

Health communication is crucial for better connectivity between the health service providers and beneficiaries of public health. Health communication is necessary to disseminate relevant health information to the people and promote public health. Various communications media are used for the purpose of health communication. Social norms messages have not resulted in consistent attitude change among the people in the health sector. Health communication strategies should be designed on the basis of social, professional and marketing considerations (Campo et. al, 2004).

Health communication has strengthened the process of health management in modern times. Technical and narrative rationality are primarily considered as the health crisis communication elements (Eisenberg et. al, 2005). Scientific research methodologies should be adopted by the health researchers for effective management of health communication. New communication technologies and tools have enriched the process of health communication. They have also enhanced transparency, accountability and responsibility of health administrators and communicators (Chetley, 2006). Digital sources and resources should be developed and utilized in the health institutions to achieve better connectivity between the service providers and users of service.

People seek health information from the traditional media, new media and health professionals. The health care providers have a responsibility of designing and facilitating optimal informational interventions on the basis of scientific evaluation. New collaboration between health communication and public health scholars has begun to generate important transdisciplinary scientific outcomes. Intersections between health communication and public health scholarship practically exist in the health sector. Health communication had also dealt with communication theories and practices (Kreps et. al, 2008). Multi-disciplinary approaches and multimedia campaigns would boost health communication management.

Mainstream media are not effective sources of health communication. Behavioral scientists, health professionals and communication specialists have not participated actively in designing health communication strategies (Rimal and Lapinski, 2009). Health communication is necessary to change the attitudes, behaviors and practices of people. People have sought primarily illness and wellness related health information from various sources including media (Weaver et. al, 2010). Persuasive health communication has the power to bring about positive attitude towards health. Health information campaigns should be organized by the health organizations by utilizing both traditional and new media of communication.

Electronic health communication has emerged on the basis of revolutionary changes in communication science and technology. It has great promise to influence behavioral health outcomes among the people. Myriad individual, organizational and societal factors are associated with health-related decisions and behaviors. Health communication should be developed on the basis of a multi-disciplinary approach to enhance the status of public health system. Mobile telecommunication tools and technologies are integrated into the health care delivery system. They are also used as behavior change communication by the service providers in health sector (Gurman et. al, 2012). Formative, process and summative research should be conducted in the field of health communication for better health management.

Health communication is developed on the basis of good intentions, precedent and expedience over a period of time. It is managed to influence health attitudes and behaviors of the people in a positive manner. Health communication research is necessary to achieve the goal of institutionalization of evidence-based health communication programs, policies, and practices. Demographic factors have significant association with the health information seeking behavior of the people. Television, Internet and professionals have become major sources of health information of the people (Gavgani et. al, 2013). Public libraries should be utilized as the principal source of health education in modern society.

Internet revolution has created new electronic communication channels to facilitate effective health education. The mobile devices had gained the potential for leveraging these tools for effective health education programs. The ICTs and social media have widened the scope of health education and cut across health literacy barriers. New media engagement for health management should be based on specific communication strategies and approaches. Social media are potential platforms for the improvement of women's health education and promotion. Health communication research should focus on new media application and participatory health communication since online health information has gained new momentum.

The concept of health has wider scope since it is now apparent that a more balanced consideration of the biological, social, and cultural aspects of health is needed. The attainment of the goal of health for all depends upon the establishment of adequate health infrastructural facilities and judicious distribution of health services across the country. Health communication is required to increase knowledge and to reinforce desired attitudinal and behavioral patterns concerning health management of individuals as well as communities (Guru, 2015). The intervention of communication media becomes imperative from health communication point of view. The ultimate goal of health communication is to enhance the health related knowledge of people, change the attitude of the people towards health and facilitate adoption of healthy practices by the target groups.

Social media have transformed the health communication in Africa. The young generation of users has primarily depended on social media for health communication (Fayoyin, 2016). The youth need proper orientation on the social media application for better health and development. Modern websites should be developed by the health institutions for the benefit of young generation (Jacobs et. al, 2017). Health professionals and communicators need orientation programmes to gain capacity in the media

management for better health communication. Health communication is an important constituent of public health and health promotion. It aims at positively influencing the health behavior of people by informing and instructing common masses about health related issues.

National and international professional organization, non-government organizations, media organizations and other agencies were actively involved in the process of health communication. Effective coordination among the policy makers, administrators, health professionals and communication specialists is required to develop health communication system.

The weak links in the integration process of communication, coordination and referral across professions have affected the public interest. Health communication campaigns are necessary to develop and sustain public health management (Atchison et. al, 2018). Health communication is developed on the basis of new technologies, tools and practices. It has improved the visibility and accessibility of medical intervention for better health management (Kerna, 2018). Modern information and communication technologies should be suitably incorporated into the system of health management and communication.

Health communication has provided a forum for journalists and health researchers to promote the translation of health-related research findings into realities. Health research projects are essential to facilitate better health interventions at various levels. Health communication has gained an intercultural context in the age of globalization. It should be developed on the basis of inter-disciplinary approaches and appropriate communication strategies. Demographic factors including education and profession have influenced the health information seeking behavior of the people. Print media, electronic media, new media, social media and health professionals are the prominent sources of health information (Yamashita et. al, 2019). Health communication strategies should be designed by the communication experts and health professionals jointly for the benefit of the masses.

Mass media have become the major source of information about the COVID-19 pandemic. The media have also created fear psychosis and caused psychological stress among the people (Anwar et. al, 2020). The new pandemic had posed unique challenges for public health practitioners and health communicators in the world. Social media have conducted mental health campaigns in the effective manner and reached out to the people at the earliest time (Latha, et. al, 2020). Effective and strategic use of digital media would enhance the quality of health information and health counseling. News media have focused on health related topics and challenges. Topic modeling of news articles has produced useful information about the health problems and remedies. Health professionals and communicators should be equipped to build capacity for the management of crisis.

Healthcare professionals and specialists are not trained adequately in the art of health communication management (Van, 2021). It is necessary to develop the skills and competence of health professionals and communicators. Machine Learning is a robust and powerful digital tool for effective health communication (Siddique and Chow, 2021). Artificial intelligence would reduce healthcare costs and make research tasks more efficient. Inadequate health facilities and poor public health communication services have affected the lives of migrants. The migrants need an enabling environment to live well and



earn well in a new challenging environment. They need facilities to enhance their capacity to cooperate and exchange knowledge and practice in public health. Public and private sector health organizations use social media to provide useful information on health management aspects. The social media should be judiciously and professionally utilized as tools of health management and communication.

## Summary

The fundamental right to health should not be at the whims and fancies of the government authorities. The importance of creating an enabling environment to make it possible health for all has been underscored by the champions of human rights. The Part III of the Constitution of India bears emphasis that access to education and health is not a governmental largesse. The state has an affirmative obligation to facilitate access to health to all citizens at all levels. This obligation assumes far greater importance in a democracy since people have a right to health regardless of class, caste, gender, religion, disability and geographical region. Education and health are the primary vehicles by which socially and economically marginalized sections can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in the mainstream of national life

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