



Health Communication

BA (JMC) 108

UNIT 3

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Health Reporting and Writing

1. Ethics in Health Reporting
2. Structure and guidelines for health reporting
3. Health reporting for various media: Traditional and digital media
4. Writing for public healthcare: Think globally and write locally


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Ethics in Health Reporting

- Health reporting can be of varied types with different aspects to be covered such as:
 - Public and Community Health
 - Disease Outbreaks
 - Health Policy
 - Business
 - Health Infrastructure
 - Corruption and Ethical matters
 - Consumer health Drugs and Diseases
 - Factors affecting health


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Ethics are the **norms for conduct** that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior.


- Accurate and sensitive communication of health care information is essential to the whole population. Ethical canons in journalism make sure that health and safety of people are not jeopardized.
- Today, instant communication technologies match the pace of scientific discovery more than ever, yet public don't have core knowledge of health & medicine.
- Despite the public cravings for health news, information does not necessarily increase its quality.

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- Ethical health and medical communicator is needed to develop a truly health literate public.
- The health and medical writers and producers who create stories for the public look for concrete, emotional anecdotes that breathe life into the transfer of information.
- Health information is presented to public, doctors, scientists, and media erodes. So, burden is not only on health industry, but entertainment industry too, it being principal messenger.
- The audience receiving accurate info from shows help them make right health decisions and choices.
- In the current scenario, there is a great burden of ethical practices on ppl who disseminate health information as there is pressure to 'sell' story first, best, and only one with it.

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- But as journalists, we must be aware of unintended effects on our audiences as communicators of health are a diverse group.
- A major setback-not all health communication providers are specifically trained for it. News outlets send less experienced general assignment reporters to cover life science story.
- When scientists communicate information to journalists, it shouldn't be presented out of context and no essential material should be withheld.
- Accuracy, clarity, accountability, honesty and decency should be maintained in providing scientific information
- Common practice of multiple sources do not apply here, and the best stories not always have both sides' viewpoints

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- Quoting multiple camps can result in confusion. Hence, a health writer, as interpreter for the public, is obligated to the audience to communicate the best informed viewpoint rather than any viewpoint that comes along.
- Journalists recognize the power of the words and images they use in defining and characterizing their subjects.
- There are guides to reporting and practices that encourage reporters and editors to **avoid stereotypical language** and **ensure careful use of images** when referring to health and medical information dissemination.


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Structure and guidelines for health reporting


- But the publication of a **single document will not lead to eradication of distortion** and sensationalism, as it is also found that the **sources of distortion often lie within science and health communities themselves** in which they present their research to audience.
- Journalists should understand potentially harmful effects of inaccurate or unbalanced reporting of health and science issues.
- The purpose of the structure and guidelines for health reporting is to **raise awareness among news organizations, journalists, journalism students and professors, and news story informants on how to improve reporting on health issues**. Eg. WHO's surgical safety checklist.
- There is growing interest in health stories.

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- The first step towards becoming a health reporter is to develop well grounded awareness of health and medical science.
- Every health story should have essential elements-fairness, objectivity, accuracy and attribution of sources.
- Half truth, bluff are not a part of health reporting.

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• A solid and concise conclusion that powerfully summarizes the writer's opinion. Give it some punch.

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Photographs in Health Journalism

- Telling story with pictures
- They enhance a story
- Must take own photographs
- Should not be obscene
- Graphics should be decent too


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Health reporting in India


- Health related issues/problems are common and widespread. While there are countless opportunities for journalists here, still the standard of reporting is quite low.
- The skill and knowledge gaps and lack of objectivity are plaguing medical journalism in India.
- Health, in spite of its immense significance, doesn't seem to be a priority beat for journalists in India.
- In fact, few journalists specialize in health reporting. Mostly it is taken up when a pressing public health issue like a disease outbreak comes to the fore.

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- Health reporting in India hasn't really been able to develop as a full-fledged beat.
- The need of the hour is to understand the importance of health as a subject and to greatly expand the horizon of health reporting.


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Challenges for health reporters in India

- Lack of in-depth understanding of issues
- Lack of data
- Non-cooperative officials
- Reluctance of patients to talk about the diseases that affects them, often fearing stigma
- Limited news sources


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Things to keep in mind for better health reporting

- The stories should be information based which would help people and health care providers in making sensible and optimal treatment choices. They should be able to bridge the communication gap between the doctor and patient.
- Maintain connect and relevance.
- Stories should have an element of resonance. Stories which focus on people help establish connect with the audience rather than mere narration of facts. The reporter must try and make the story **compelling** to establish a strong **human connect**. To maintain the credibility of the report it should not stick to just one's person's opinion but the perspective of different people related to the case.

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- Focus on the human angle of the questions asked. Don't ask just facts.
- Constructive use of social media can help in building a story well.
- The media is a tool or vehicle that serves as a link or bridge between the source and the receiver.
- Broadly, media is divided into 4 categories: traditional media, print media, electronic media and new media.

1. Traditional media (popularly known as folk media)

- Defined as *those media which attempt to communicate a message to a particular group of target audiences in a given time, in a local dialect, with entertainment*. In India, it is considered as **mass-motivators**.

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Health reporting for various media: Traditional and digital media


- It is audio visual media as the audience sees and listens in it.

Forms of traditional media

Motive-dissemination of information through combination of drama, dance, song, story-telling, puppetry, nautanki, sculptures, etc.


- 1. Nautankis:** Mostly on social messages in the last 4 decades like health, HIV/AIDS, women empowerment and family planning
- 2. Puppets (Kathputalies):** popular in rural areas
- 3. Harikatha:** Popular in southern India, kathakars sit in the village square and narrate stories, are still very popular among the masses.

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- **Jatra:** Popular folk-theatre form of the Bengali theatre. Usually four hour long plays preceded by a musical concert, often lasting an hour, used to attract the audience. The dramatic performance is liberally mixed with dramatic monologues, songs and duet dances on folk tunes.
- **Paala:** Directly concerned with the life of a common man. Being crowned with the indigenous and special traits of Oriya life, it not only entertains the common man but also inspires him to religious, moral, truthful and spiritual way of life. Excellent common art with high intellectual and literary values.
- **Pandavani:** Teejan Bai is an exponent of Pandavani, a traditional performing art form, from Chhattisgarh, in which she enacts tales from the Mahabharata, with musical accompaniments.
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- Fairs and Festivals:** Certain fairs and festivals are culture, as well as region specific, for example, Durga Puja in West Bengal, Baisakhi in Punjab, Ganesh Chaturthi in Maharashtra, Pongal in Tamil Nadu, Onam in Kerala, and so on. These are a few occasions where the communication becomes stronger, effective and action oriented


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Advantages of Traditional Media


- Most useful in human communication.
- No need for special training or technology
- Mostly embedded in one's own culture and tradition.
- Very much a part of our lives.
- Feedback is immediate and known.
- Flexibility in changing the form and content for the existing context.
- Low cost media.
- Very easy to remember and can quickly attract the masses.

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- Primary appeal is to the emotions rather than the intellect.
- Commands an immense variety of forms and themes to suit the communication requirements of the masses.
- Local and live, and able to establish direct rapport with the audience.
- Easily available to their audience.
- Flexible to accommodate new themes.
- Enjoyed and approved by all the people from different age groups


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Role of Traditional Media in Health Communication


- The role of folk media in publicizing social projects, such as family planning and matters of hygiene and nutrition etc. has come into the forefront since independence.
- Private agencies like Darpan have produced several plays on social themes, either with or without official backing and support. The government sponsored play Aram-Rajya, relates to family planning, health and nutrition.
- Aram-Rajya became popular and ran 250 shows between 1965 and 1966, with five to ten thousand people attending each show.

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- Native leaders used to disseminate information like midwives (family planning), prominent village personality (village pradhan, school teachers, opinion leaders, influential locals) for communication of messages to villagers. A village headman is involved in reminding people to practice birth control.

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2. Print Media

- Newspapers: Imp. role in providing authentic firsthand information, building opinions and updating the knowledge of the reader, and serves as a good platform for advertisers to promote their products
- Magazines: For readers looking for specific type of info., can be weekly, fortnightly, bi-monthly, quarterly, half-yearly, or yearly.
- Booklets, brochures, folders and pamphlet
- Newsletters
- Handbills, flyers or leaflets

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- Press releases
- Posters

Advantages of print media in health communication

- People would like to retain the information communicated by the health workers for future use. Print media such as newspapers, magazines, bulletins, brochures, leaflets and pamphlets etc. can easily be referred to in the future.
- Credibility of printed material is very high.
- The readers can re-circulate the printed material easily amongst their friends and persons who require the


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information for their use.

- Individuals who are reading printed materials can easily preserve them for years for future use.
- Production is easier and simpler.
- Cost-wise, it is cheaper and effective means of communication.

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3. Electronic media (broadcast media)

- Television
- Radio

Advantages of electronic media

- Outreach is more and audiences are heterogeneous.
- Messages can be communicated within no time.
- Messages can be communicated to large number of people at a time.
- Variety of audio, video, text can be used in one single medium.

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- Great possibility of recording and archiving the content for future use.
- In the near future it might be possible to make this medium interactive.

Role of electronic media in health communication

- Effective in convincing a large target audience to adopt healthy practices & remind them of critical information
- Eg-tv in fighting causes of IMR in India like diarrhoeal infection, new skills and behaviours like ORS solution.
- Eg- Polio vaccination campaign

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Digital media (new media)

-increased connectivity with cutting edge technology

- Mobile phones
- Computers
- Internet

Popular tools of digital media:

- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- Facebook

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- Podcasts
- E-forum
- Blogging
- Online tv

Role of new media in health communication

- Used for the dissemination of healthcare related info. among the masses, esp. the youth across the world.
- Various healthcare related public and private organizations are using digital technologies, like internet, computer games, mobile phones, and digital television, to enhance communication and engagement


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among people on varied health related issues.

- One can create audio spots, a video spot or a jingle related to health, and can upload the same on YouTube or any other video sharing sites.
- You can find various health related videos created under the National Rural health Mission on YouTube.
- One can find health info anytime eg pregnant women
- Health-related documentary films, audio jingles, and articles on YouTube and on the websites of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, National Institute of Health and Family Welfare, Jansankhya Sthirata Kosh,

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and other bodies working in the health sector. These websites are nicely designed and are updated regularly.

- Online communities using social media, pictures with mobile journalism

Role of social media in health communication

- Growing tool, offers cost-effective solutions to audience
- Social media is new media with a social focus, where information is shared with the purpose of networking. Social Networking Sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and others allow individuals to instantly communicate with large networks of friends, acquaintances


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and colleagues, while supporting multimedia content linked to other social media applications such as YouTube.

- Social media provides opportunities for users to **generate, share, receive, and comment on social content among multi users** through multisensory communication.
- Thereby social media can be defined to be functioning as a communication channel that delivers a message, which involves asking for something. Social networking is thus two-way and implies direct communication that includes sharing of information between several parties.

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Writing for Public Healthcare: Think Globally and Write Locally

- In the age of globalization, writers should write localization issues
- Some documents need more than writing, i.e. localization
- In localization, language professionals write the source documents' words and adapt content to norms and needs of target audience.

Writing for Public Healthcare

- Writing is **varied by purpose and audience** and hence writing is an essential skill for anyone who wants to work in public health.
- There should be **extensively researched technical report**, which can be used by upper mgt.
- Research should be well executed with extensive citations, comprehensive in scope, logical sequencing of ideas and concepts.

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- Ultimately, the goal of a report is to **get the message out**, and mostly, one must cater to the audience one wants to reach.
- In most instances, the results, findings and conclusions do possess credibility, and most Public Health practitioners can rest a little easy that their efforts are appreciated

'Think globally and act locally'

- It urges people to consider the health of the entire planet and to take action in their own communities and cities. Long before governments began enforcing environmental laws, individuals were coming together to protect habitats and the organisms that live within them. It is a global concept with high importance.

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- Structuring the writing: Creating a good outline is important
- Technical writers often create the source documents so they must be responsible
- Organizations also invest in their resources by providing specific training and support to technical writers & others creating source documents

Content tips:

- Be cautious of date and address formats
- Use consistent terminology
- Avoid abbreviations and acronyms

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- If using acronyms, use acronym definition list

Writing Style Tips

- Avoid passive voice. Use a direct, simple writing style and short sentences.
- Do not use upper-case letters to emphasize a particular action
- Write full sentences including all articles, unless there is absolutely no alternative.
- Avoid jargon, slang, and buzzwords.
- If a term is not listed as acceptable in a current reputable dictionary or specialized glossary, don't use it.

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- Avoid —modifier strings. Example: -plastic tip fastener clips. (too many adjectives or adverbs)

Modifier strings make up the most common form of grammatical ambiguity. Break these long uninterrupted strings of nouns and adjectives into smaller pieces.


- Avoid —invisible plurals. These are usually two-word phrases (noun + noun), in which it is not clear whether the first noun is meant to be singular or plural. Example: program update, file retrieval
- Avoid using the slash (/) as casual punctuation.
- Avoid wordy expressions for time, place, and relationship. Example: Use now instead of 'at this point in time'.

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- Avoid gender-specific words. Avoid —he, she/his, her and use —they/their instead.
- Don't waste words telling readers what the text is going to say, or reminding them what it said earlier. Just say it once. The document's credibility is not determined by its length. Shorter documents tend to have more impact, as do shorter sentences.

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Ready to go local

- Can also take help of experienced language services company
- They can help identify solutions and suggest approaches to save money while improving results. It's always a good idea to involve them early in the process – experienced professionals can spot potential issues early on, which may mitigate or eliminate barriers later, when changes can be expensive.
- Lastly, work jointly with stakeholders to provide resource and reference materials, and work through solutions and review your processes. The more communication with stakeholder, the better job they can do

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