Health Literacy and Communication: Maximizing Your Organization's Efforts for Reaching the Media and the Public

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Jon Stemmle, MA, Associate Director
Amy Dunaway, MPH
Health Communication Research Center
National Action Plan for Health Literacy

- Goal 1: Develop and disseminate health and safety information that is accurate, accessible, and actionable.
Great, but…

• How do we develop and disseminate this information to the media?
Media strategies abound

- Traditional methods: press releases, press events
- Social networking: Facebook, LinkedIn
- Microblogging: Twitter
- Online: web sites, blogs

- Try one, not all.
Understand the scope

• Scan the environment:
  – Know your audience
  – Know your media outlets
  – Know what’s on the ground: partners, programs, resources
  – Know what works: lit reviews, other stories

• Understand your capacity:
  – What buy-in do you have? Whose do you need?
  – What media strategies make sense for you, your community, your media?
  – What can you realistically evaluate?
ACME RESEARCH CENTER

ROSETTA STONE

INTRO TO LAYMAN'S LANGUAGE

2-25
Look at your media landscape

• How do your media outlets cover health?
  – What is done well?
  – Where are the gaps?
  – Develop your own media contact list and update the data regularly.

• See what network of partners you have and who might lead you to, or be able to serve as, a source for local quotes or data.
Analyze HL needs/resources

• Assess the community first
  – What are the needs and challenges?
  – Where might health literacy fit in?

• Who are your allies?

• Who is currently working on health literacy that could partner with you?
Tips to increase your pick up

• Keep it simple.
• Make the story timely and newsworthy.
• Be clear.
• Make it relevant. Why does it, or should it, matter to them and their readers?
• Give them data and some context.
Things to keep in mind

• Up-to-date contact information is key.
• Extra time needed.
• Maintain the health literacy message.
• Technical challenges will arise.
• Data challenges.
• Messaging matters.
A CASE STUDY FROM MISSOURI:

What you need to know before you begin
Our health literacy plan

• Create and send health news releases to statewide Missouri media outlets.
• Partner with Missouri Press Association, Missouri local public health agencies, state Extension offices.
• Research the implementation of the media intervention.
• Work with partners on directions and next steps for the intervention.
How did we decide on our plan?

• Start with the scope:
  – Funders and partners already knew health literacy was a problem = buy in
  – Strong history with media
  – Strong research center with staff and resources
  – Interest in addressing health literacy statewide
Know your audience

In Missouri:

• 84% of all counties have < 50K in population

• 53% counties under 20K population

• 66% (approx 4 million) live in St. Louis and Kansas City Metro areas
Know your population’s health profile

**Some health indicators from Missouri:**

- More than 1 in 3 adults are overweight (36%)\(^1\) and almost 1 in 3 adults are obese (29.1%).\(^1\)
- 9.3% of adults currently have diabetes.\(^1\)
- 19.6% of adults currently have high blood pressure.\(^1\)
- Almost 1 in 4, or 23.2% of adults, smoke.\(^1\)
- Lowest cigarette tax in the nation at 17¢.\(^2\)
- MO ranks **last** in the U.S. in state funding for public health.\(^3\)

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1. MO DHSS Community Level Profiles, 2007.
3. CDC, FY 2009
Know your population’s access

In Missouri:

Home Broadband Availability

Community Broadband Availability

Maps from Transform Missouri: http://transform.mo.gov/broadband/maps.php

Community broadband accounts for Internet access in ‘anchor areas,’ such as schools, churches, and libraries within a community.
Know what access your audience trusts & uses for health information

**Examples**

- Facebook
- Twitter
- SMS (text messaging)
- Radio
- TV
- Local newspapers
- Network newspapers
- Blogs
Know where you stand

A national comparison of health topic coverage in the media

Google News search for March 2011

- Diabetes: 16,400
- Obesity: 8,590
- Breast cancer: 7,290
- High blood pressure: 3,670
- HIV/AIDS: 3,610
- Health literacy: 124
Conclusions for Missouri

• Our population most trusted the local newspapers.
• These newspapers became our primary target audience.
PUTTING THE PLAN INTO ACTION
Findings from our survey data

• National survey of journalists
  – Sample pulled from Barron’s and Editor & Publisher
  – Literature review
  – In-depth interviews with individual newspaper editors and reporters

Heard of Health Literacy

- Don’t know
- No
- Yes

- 62%
- 37%
- 1%
HLM News Service

• Funded by Health Literacy Missouri
• Provides ready-to-use, tailored health literate stories to all local news and media outlets in the state
• Original graphics
• Localized data and quotes
• Message blocks or action steps
Messaging

• Concrete, evidence-based messages
• Use simple, positive language
• “Social math”
• Emphasize behavior changes as normative
• Use clear, simple graphics
• Memory aids
RESULTS TO DATE
Longitudinal Evaluation of Health Literacy in Local MO News

**Graph Description:**
- **Y-axis:** Numbers ranging from 0 to 400
- **X-axis:** Years from 2005 to 2010
- **Lines:**
  - Blue: Our Intervention
  - Red: Health lit/HLM PR
  - Green: Other/general PR
- **Data Points:**
  - 2005-06: 3
  - 2007: 3
  - 2008: 3
  - 2009: 55
  - 2010: 352
Newspaper hits by county (as of March 15, 2011)
Top Releases

- R1 - H1N1: 22
- R7 - H1N1 Update: 30
- R14 - Skin cancer: 24
- R16 - Salt: 18
- R19 - Whooping cough: 18
- R25 - Breast cancer: 19
- R29 - COPD: 18
- R34 - HC reform in 2011: 24
Intervention to date (Oct. 28, 2009 – Feb. 1, 2011)

- 36 news releases disseminated
- 431 stories picked up
- 111 different newspapers in 79 counties
- Avg. circulation size 3,800+
- Stories have reached more than 1.6 million readers
- 87% of hits were in rural areas (county population <50K)
Questions? Contact us

Jon Stemmle (stemmlej@missouri.edu)
hcrc@missouri.edu
http://hcrc.missouri.edu

Health Communication Research Center at the Missouri School of Journalism