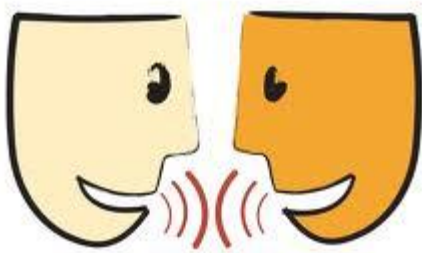




Effective Communication

CHS 456



Aim of this Lecture

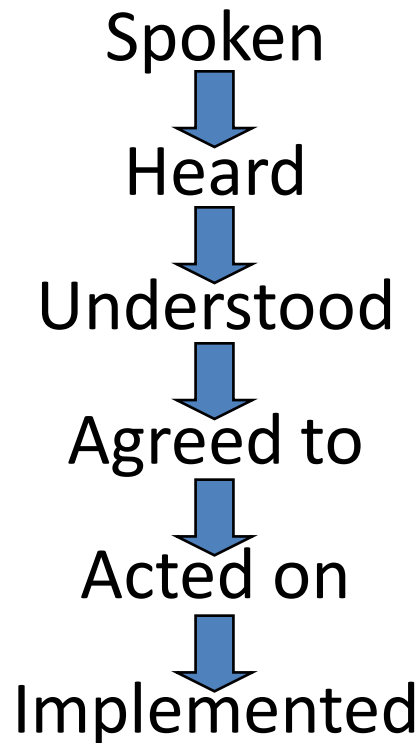
To understand the concept of effective communication.

Learning outcomes:

By the ends of this lecture , students will be able to:

- Understand the meaning of effective communication
- Understand the importance of effective communication
- Tips for communicating: policy makers, consumers, older people, men , women, children and teachers

What is effective communications?



"You can't not communicate. Everything you say or do or don't say and don't do sends a message to others."

– John Woods

Effective communication is the art of being understood and of understanding others

Why is effective communication important?

Communication in all its forms – including, education, advocacy, social networking, behavioral counseling can:

- Raise awareness of your organization
- To share research findings
- Advocate for policies/programs
- Promote positive changes to benefit health and quality of life
- Improve public health and health care services
- To raise awareness of health risks and solutions
- Provide motivation and skills to reduce these risks, change attitudes and behavior

To be effective communication must be:

- ❖ Accurate & evidence based
- ❖ Balanced
- ❖ Consistent
- ❖ Available
- ❖ Timely
- ❖ Repeated
- ❖ Understandable
- ❖ Relevant & in context of everyday life



Why our communication skills need to be better than ever

- ❑ The environment for communicating about health has changed.
- ❑ Dramatic increase in communication channels (e.g. computers, telephones, television, radio, video, print, and audio) and the emergence of the Internet has expanded choices available to reach intended audience.
- ❑ Increase in competing health issues.
- ❑ Consumer demand for better quality information – can be selective and seek out personally targeted information.
- ❑ Problem of inconsistent and conflicting advice.
- ❑ Greater challenge to select the best channel for and content of health information and to identify reasons that will motivate people to pay attention to and use it.

Different audiences need different approaches

- Effective communication adopt an audience-centered perspective - reflecting audiences' preferred formats, channels, and contexts.
- Must reflect people's everyday lives, current eating habits, attitudes, beliefs, lifestyles.
- Especially the case for who may have different languages, sources of information, cultural beliefs.
- Other key considerations: age, stage of life, gender, education, income, physical and mental functioning.
- Some groups harder to reach than others and therefore often underserved.

Tips for targeting health professionals

- ✓ Be aware that you are competing with a huge amount of other health information – for most information must be brief and to the point
- ✓ Must be trustworthy source
- ✓ Have clearly defined messages written in a style suitable for the type of health professional you are trying to reach
- ✓ Different levels of information often required – e.g. if written information provide summary, key points after each section etc



Talking to policy makers

Why bother?

- **Governments have responsibility for health and safety of citizens**
- **Influence research funding**
- **Direct delivery of healthcare**

Do some research

- **Spend time researching who to contact**
- **Check websites of any relevant departments to keep track of policy announcements, press releases, ministerial speeches and consultation papers of relevance**
- **Remember: policy makers**
 - **are busy**
 - **are used to multitasking**
 - **are generalists (knowledge might be out of date)**
 - **can interpret evidence in many ways (have complex agenda)**

Policy makers

Tips for communicating:

- ✓ Provide useful, objective information. Be concise and to the point
- ✓ If writing, put key points in first paragraph to grab attention quickly
- ✓ If sending briefing document, keep it short. Include executive summary
- ✓ Assume scientific knowledge of an intelligent 14 yr old
- ✓ Use the media to indirectly communicate with decision makers



Consumers

Why bother?

- Increasing interest in nutrition & greater access to health information.
- Huge amount of conflicting advice makes it harder for consumers to trust information sources and recognise sound science .

Remember: Consumers need direct information

Tips for communicating:

- Make information simple with 'take home' messages
- Use short sentences and common words
- Avoid abbreviations and ambiguous words
- Write as you would speak
- Use clear font
- Use active form not passive



Consumers

- ✓ Use pictures/graphics/case studies to illustrate a story
- ✓ Don't use more words than you need
- ✓ Give practical information/advice (what can I do?)
- ✓ Provide examples
- ✓ Make practical suggestions applicable to sub-group (age, gender, income etc)
 - Don't suggest joining a gym as a way get active if on low income, biking for older people etc!
- Be careful around sensitivities eg avoid 'old people', discuss body weight carefully

Older people

- More interested in diet-related issues
- Ask them ... where they live and who take care of them
- Many will have existing health problems – requiring more detailed information
- Ageing can also be associated with cognitive impairment and socioeconomic factors (e.g. low income) that may impact on ability to understand or access health information
- Physical changes of ageing (e.g. failing eyesight) may require consideration of alternative formats and communication methods (large print, audio and video cassette, personal contact, assistive listening devices)



Key tips for targeting teachers/school children



- ✓ Ensure content is consistent, up to date and accurate
- ✓ Understand what is required in the curriculum – what do teachers have to teach
- ✓ Give information at appropriate level
- ✓ Use presentation and active learning strategies
- ✓ Keep it clear and concise
- ✓ Have learning aims and objectives
- ✓ Keep sentences short and to the point
- ✓ If you ask a question, make sure you can answer it (or make sure it doesn't just need a yes/no answer if you wanted more)
- ✓ You may need to allow for differentiation in a group e.g. supporting the least able and challenging the higher more able
- ✓ Use correct terminology (e.g. metric measurements)

Income

- Often less likely to have access to and understand health information
- Access to computers may be limited, literacy abilities may be insufficient, basic computer skills may be lacking
- **However**, access to internet in lower income groups is increasing

Therefore:

- Examples need to be inexpensive
- Recipes/meal suggestions inexpensive/accessible at inexpensive supermarkets

Men vs women



- ❖ Women tend to get health information from General practitioners “doctors”, television, Internet, and printed materials
- ❖ Men are less likely to visit their General practitioner and access information from other health professionals
- ❖ Men tend to focus on being fit, strong, energetic & physically active (although they are more likely to smoke ,and be overweight)
- ❖ Women tend to be more motivated by advice to avoid ill health and put greater stress on diet than exercise
- ❖ Women tend to use the internet more than the men to search for health information for themselves and their families
- ❖ Women more likely to consider ‘slimming’ and ‘diet/light’ products

Activity 1

Targeting the message to your audience

Targeting the message to your audience

- What 3 key messages would you select for the following:
 - A General practitioner (Doctor)
 - A health watchers, Diet center leader
 - An overweight consumer

References

All slides from :

- Stanner S, Miles I. (2010): *Effective Communication*. February 4.[lecture].Southampton: University of Southampton. School of medicine.