

DISCUSSION GUIDE

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION FOR HEALTHY OUTCOMES

Health Communications: The Message, The Messenger, & The Audience

Presenter: Dr. Austin Demby, Deputy Director, Office of Global Health at the Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Lesson Description

Analyzing the importance of which health message is being delivered, who delivers the health message, and whether the message is being delivered in a way that is simple enough for an audience to understand.

Lesson Objectives

1. What are the three key pillars of reporting and communicating health information?
2. Why is it important to accurately report health information?
3. What are the consequences of distributing and promoting inaccurate health information?

Discussion Questions

1. In the lesson, Dr. Demby notes that for health messages to have an impact on their intended audiences, they must be important, relevant, credible, reliable and verifiable. Can you think of a recent health campaign in your community? Was it clear to whom the message was directed? What were some of the ways the message was crafted to reach the intended audience? In what ways did you think it was effective or not? Was it clear that the health campaign was based on reliable data from a credible source? If so, how? How do you think the message could have had a bigger impact on the intended audience? Did it resonate with you?
2. As noted in the lesson, the health messenger is as important as the health message. Who do you consider your most credible, straightforward, honest and nonjudgmental health messenger? Why? What are the best sources of credible health messaging for your community and why? What are some of the reasons you would not listen to a health messenger? How can you ensure that as a health messenger you don't pass on misinformation that could fuel the spread of disease or turn people off of your message?
3. Crafting health messages for specific audiences is critical. People you're trying to communicate with may have different backgrounds and beliefs, and different groups may receive and react to messages differently. How many potentially different "audiences" can you identify in your community? What are the similarities between the groups? What are the most significant differences? How do you avoid stigmatizing individuals and communities? How can one group positively or negatively influence how the health message might be received? How can you craft a message that provides a clear call to action to one audience and also encourages support from other audiences? What tools and tactics could be used to reach distinct audiences?

Developmental Actions

1. Identify a health topic you think needs to be addressed in your community and craft a relevant, credible, verifiable and nonjudgmental message that will resonate.



2. Identify specific tools that could be used to reach audiences with this health message. Draft specific messaging and audiences for each tool.
3. Identify the different groups in your community to whom you would direct the message. Identify the distinct characteristics of each group that might influence how they might receive and respond to a public health message.

About the Presenter: Dr. Austin Demby currently serves as Deputy Director for the Office of Global Health at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), a part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dr. Demby has a master's degree in Public Health-Epidemiology/ Biostatistics from the University of Michigan and a doctoral degree in Clinical Microbiology from the University of London. Dr. Demby began his career as a research scientist with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) where he served for over 30 years in various capacities. He has served as country director of the CDC field station in Sierra Leone, was a founding member of CDC's Global AIDS Program (GAP), and served as the Director of the CDC Malawi program. Recently, he played a key role in the U.S. government's response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa.