



ROLE OF MEDIA IN SAFE GUARDING HEALTH OF THE SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

The road is the same, up- hill or down-hill. And it's our choice to choose one of the two. But the destination at the end of the road is different. Let us all appreciate the fact that there is a big difference between advertising a commodity such as a table, chair, mobile phone and a Medicine. In the first case, if the advertised claims are not met, the commodity such as a chair or a table may last for only 2 years in place of 5 years. We may even forget the original guarantee period given at the time of purchase and buy another new commodity, but in case of medicines the story is different. If you are taking a medicine for say reducing blood pressure and if it fails to do so as indicated, you are likely to end up in an emergency ward of a hospital for the treatment of heart-attack. We often come across advertisements, which make tall claims, such as Increase your male stamina, Improve your memory instantly, Lose 10 kg of weight in 10 days etc. Beyond doubt, there are certain medicines, which work wonders, but surely not in all patients and certainly not in 10 days. Furthermore, there are some medicines very popular in the society at large for their beneficial effects and are likely to be consumed without consulting a physician. Recently, Media has done a wonderful job by making a common man aware about the expiry date of goods. This noble initiative can also be extended to medicines, which would help in saving several innocent lives. Furthermore, there are a few physicians, who are unable to keep themselves up-to-date due to patient rush and ambitious lifestyle. The authors would like to make a mention of few such medicines, which though popular in every house hold are likely to cause life-threatening side effects. Pioglitazone, a powerful anti-diabetic medicine, analgin, a promising pain killer and de-anxit, an anti-depressant drug have all been banned recently by Drugs Controller General of India for their serious adverse effects. A common man, who is busy in earning his daily bread, needs to be informed about these Banned Drugs. The authors advocate that media persons can play a positive role here. Then, there is also an issue of magic remedies, which claim to possess miraculous powers misleading the public. These magic remedies falsely claim that certain chronic diseases such as Diabetes, Asthma, Cancer, AIDS etc can be easily cured. The author would like to enlighten the learned readers with these health related issues and provide simple check points and solutions for a healthy and peaceful life.

Keywords: Media, Health, Banned drugs, Society

INTRODUCTION

Life is not a bed of roses now-a-days. The present generation youngsters have more demands and desires as compared to yesteryears. They are very much aware of their rights. Furthermore, their ambitious life-style keeps them so busy that they often neglect their health. In any case, they have a rigid bond with the media for keeping themselves up to date. Media has an access to all the segments of the society and can be exploited as an entertaining channel to provide latest information in various spheres of life such as health, education, sports, and politics to its viewers. A layman can be practically educated by means of print media and electronic media. The local as well as international media forms a vital link between health professionals and a common man. Thus, media has an important role to play in safeguarding health of the society. Media plays an important role in creating awareness nowadays; newspapers, magazines and pamphlets, whether in written or printed form are covered under print media, whereas, radio, television, internet and mobiles are included under electronic media. Media has a unique quality of reaching a large segment of population within a short span of time. The effect of media is thought provoking. It delivers its message in an emotional manner, which leaves a great impact on a common man. Therefore, media can be effectively made use of in spreading useful information about health. The information about the health needs to be updated from time to time. However, care needs to be taken to prevent the spread of false/fake claims relating to health matters among the masses.

Health and Media

Absence of the disease doesn't mean being healthy. One is said to be healthy only when, one is physically and mentally fit, intellectually sound and emotionally stable. The World Health Organization (WHO) defined health in its broader sense as "a state of complete physical, mental, and spiritual well-being and not merely the absence of disease¹". The term media originated from the English word Medium. Media denotes an item specifically designed to reach a large number of audience or viewers. The media has a strong impact on the society. It is formulated for a large population to create general awareness among the public. Media presents the information in an acceptable manner and holds the capability to transform the whole world. Therefore, it becomes the duty of the media to be truthful and up-to-date to inform the people about the current happenings around them as well of the world. They cover all aspects of our surroundings like weather, politics, war, health, finance, science, fashion, music, sports etc. Consumers have preformed notions about health and medicines as they are not scientists. Therefore, media bears a crucial responsibility to communicate right and rational message about the safety and toxicity of the medicines. Print media such as magazines, newspapers and electronic media such as radio, television programmes and the internet cover a lot of information regarding health issues. An issue of great importance for public health today is how to mount programs that change the lifestyle of an individual in order to improve the health². Health professionals utilize the power of media to spread informative messages to public. Media is really influential as it affects the eyes, ears and mind of a person concomitantly. The role of media is to educate the people with latest advancements in health matters

and to change their perception about the superstitions and remove the ignorance about the illness. It is a great force in building the nation.

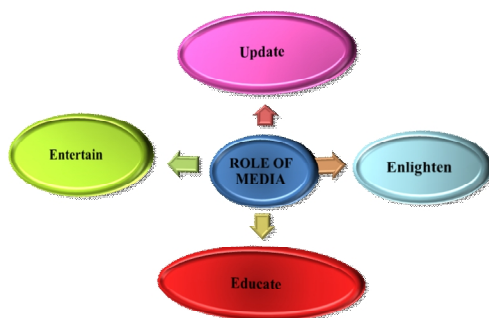


Figure 1: Role of Media

Exaggeration of Therapeutic Benefits

A news reporter faces distinctive challenges in covering health issues. Some specialized skills, knowledge, and judgment are helpful. Incomplete news or half information related to medicines must be avoided as far as possible. Poorly designed reports should not be produced. Poor reporting can, for example, lead viewers to misconstrue research findings, halt medical treatment half way, or produce disastrous consequences³. Vague, sensational terms such as miracle, breakthrough or wonder drugs may harm news consumers by adopting the misleading claims⁴. Most reporters lack confidence in their ability to interpret statistical data⁵. Let us all appreciate the fact that there is a big difference between advertising a commodity such as a table, chair, mobile phone and a Medicine. In the first case, if the advertised claims are not met, the commodity such as a chair or a table may last for only 2 years in place of 5 years. We may even forget the original guarantee period given at the time of purchase and buy another new commodity, but in case of medicines the story is different. If you are taking a medicine for say reducing blood pressure and if it fails to do so as indicated, you are likely to end up in an emergency ward of a hospital for the treatment of heart-attack. We often come across advertisements, which make tall claims, such as Increase your male stamina, Improve your memory instantly, Lose 10 kg of weight in 10 days etc. Beyond doubt, there are certain medicines, which work wonders, but surely not in all patients and certainly not in 10 days. Furthermore, there are some medicines very popular in the society at large for their beneficial effects and are likely to be consumed without consulting a physician. Recently, Media has done a wonderful job by making a common man aware about the expiry date of goods. This noble initiative can also be extended to medicines, which would help in saving several innocent lives. Furthermore, there are a few physicians, who are unable to keep themselves up-to-date due to patient rush and ambitious lifestyle. The authors would like to make a mention of few such medicines, which though popular in every house hold are likely to cause life-threatening side effects. Pioglitazone, a powerful anti-diabetic medicine, analgin, a promising pain killer and de-anxit, an anti-depressant drug have all been banned recently by Drugs Controller General of India for their serious adverse effects. Media should be particular in avoiding sensational claims not supported by data. The time is now ripe that media should rise above commercialism, respect the uncertainty of clinical trials, baseless predictions and single-source stories⁶.

However, coverage of health related news by media is generally of poor quality⁷. Reporters must cover key issues like comparative benefits, harms, and costs of the treatment. Media acts as a voice for voice-less people. It's often helpful to share the experiences of patients and their care takers. Ordinary individuals, who were unable to voice their grief and sufferings within the traditional system, now have a forum, where they have a platform for their stories⁴. While the professions of journalism and medicine, both have well-defined standards to encourage accuracy, moral values, fairness, and balanced writing, the combined process unfortunately sometimes yields a product, which conforms neither to the ideals of good science nor to good reporting, when journalists and scientists interact⁸.

Types of Media

The local as well as international media forms a vital link between health workers and the common man. Health organizations educate the media with essential health information. This is then conveyed to the public in readily accessible formats through a variety of media channels. Social media campaigning put in their best efforts to communicate health messages to the viewers. These methods include print media, television, and radio broadcasts. In addition to digital and print media, stage shows, plays, dramas and puppetry are becoming popular for delivering health care messages to the selected segments of the society.⁹ Social media, too has a great impact on people of all ages. Following are some of the examples of Social Media, which help promote health awareness:

Newspaper Articles

Newspapers provide different health related articles from renowned doctors and researchers, which mainly consist of information about different diseases and precautions to avoid them.

Health Magazines

There is a lot of information about different diseases, their causes, preventive measures and recent inventions in dedicated Health magazines.

Theater

Theatrical performances can be used to model positive health behaviors or demonstrate the consequences of high-risk activities¹⁰. It is an element of interpersonal communication. Theatre enhances viewers' reception and internalization of the message¹⁰. Health educators and theater performers should exchange knowledge and ideas for the integration of theater and health education.

Puppetry

Puppetry is an imaginative educational and entertaining method of conveying a particular message. Health authorities (nurses, health educators, trained school counselors and elementary school teachers) organize various workshops to introduce a variety of health topics, including nutrition and hygiene.

Analogies

Analogies are useful tools for forming mental constructs that simplify or render a familiar concept so that an individual of average intellect also can grasp the message¹¹. New scientific concepts regarding health issues can be easily explained by using this tool.

Health Websites

Websites of different hospitals, institutes and medical centers provide information regarding various health problems and their treatments.

Blog

It provides a lot of information shared by renowned doctors and researchers for guidance of the viewers.

Social Networking Sites

The Internet crosses national boundaries and counteracts isolation. It is easily accessible to everyone. Social Networking Sites like face book and twitter are popular tools to spread health awareness amongst the people.

Television

Many channels telecast different programs like interviews, discussions or reviews related to health awareness. Radio is frequently used by media organizations to broadcast health related information. It has a great impact on the people as radio can reach people in their homes, cars, or at work. Educational radio has been used for rural development, public health instance, health education, nutrition education and family planning programs. Mass media interventions can produce positive health changes on a grand scale by enforcing positive health behaviors among the individuals¹². Mass media operates at international, national and local/community level. Mass media forms the primary source of information for the public, on science and medical research. The mass media, in the form of the radio and television, form are an effective means to persuade target audiences to adopt new behaviors, or to remind them of critical information. It informs people about new diseases and their control. They also keep the society updated about immunization campaigns. Thus, different types of media offer distinct advantages and disadvantages, which can help in setting and achieving different goals of health programmes.

Magic Remedies

Sensational terms such as “instant cure, Sanjeevani, Ram-Baan aushadhi, miracle, Magical ring and Kavach kundal” are likely to mislead the public and harm consumers producing irreversible damages to the vital organs. The Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisement) Act was passed by Government of India in 1954 to control the false advertisements of drugs and to prohibit the advertisements of remedies alleged to possess magical qualities to cure certain diseases such as cancer, AIDS, etc. These magic remedies falsely claim that certain chronic diseases such as Diabetes, Asthma, diabetes, baldness, sexual impotence etc. can be easily cured. Moreover, no person or company will take part in such advertisements, which gives false impression or makes a false claim for the drug, which misleading a common man.

Banned Drugs

The authors would like to make a mention of few such medicines, which though popular in every house hold are likely to cause life-threatening side effects. Pioglitazone, a powerful anti-diabetic medicine, analgin, a promising pain killer and de-anxit, an anti-depressant drug have all been banned recently by Drugs Controller General of India for

their serious adverse effects. A common man, who is busy in earning his daily bread, needs to be informed about these Banned Drugs. Any pharmacological substance, which is not addressed by any of the subsequent sections of the List and with no current approval by any governmental regulatory health authority for human therapeutic use (e.g. drugs under pre-clinical or clinical development or discontinued, designer drugs, substances approved only for veterinary use) is prohibited for human use.

Substances prohibited for general use by any individual are listed below:

1. Anabolic agents such as nandrolone, testosterone
2. Peptide hormones, growth factors such as Chorionic Gonadotrophin (CG) and Luteinizing Hormone (LH)
3. Hormone and metabolic modulators such as tamoxifen and clomiphene
4. Diuretics such as hydrochlorothiazide, probenecid

Substances prohibited in competitions and tournaments

1. cocaine, ephedrine (Stimulants)
2. fentanyl, morphine (Narcotics)
3. hashish, marijuana (Cannabinoids)
4. All glucocorticosteroids.

Substances prohibited in sports

1. Alcohol
2. Beta-blockers
3. CNS stimulants

Some of the banned drugs known to have serious side-effects are readily available in the Indian market. Merck announced a worldwide withdrawal of their molecule rofecoxib, branded as Vioxx. In India, however, despite the litigations, warnings and media coverage of the adverse affects of the drug, it continues to be marketed.

Table 1: List of some drugs banned in India

I.	Phenformin
II.	Phenacetin
III.	Phenylpropanolamine
IV.	Rofecoxib
V.	Sibutramine
VI.	Propoxyphene
VII.	Diethylstilbestrol
VIII.	Tageserod
IX.	Gatifloxacin
X.	Nimuslide
XI.	Rimonabant
XII.	Pioglitazone
XIII.	Analgin
XIV.	Cisapride
XV.	Phenolphthalein

Government bodies such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the United States, office of the Drugs Controller General of India ban substances from time to time as a means to protect public health and safety. Some drugs have been withdrawn from the market because of risks to the patients. Usually this has been prompted by unexpected adverse effects, which were not detected during Phase-III clinical trials and were only apparent from post-marketing surveillance data from the wider patient community.

Table 2: List of internationally banned drugs, which are marketed in India

Generic Name	Use	Ban Reason	Brand Name
Analgin	Pain-killer	Bone-marrow depression	Novalgin, Baralgin
Furazolidone	Anti-diarrhoeal	Cancer	Furoxone, Lomofen
Nimesulide	Pain-killer, fever	Liver failure	Nise, Nimulid
Nitrofurazone	Anti-bacterial cream	Cancer	Furacin, Emfurazone
Phenolphthalein	Laxative	Cancer	Jetomisol-P
Phenylpropanolamine	Cold and cough	Stroke	D'Cold, Vicks Action 500
Oxyphenbutazone	NSAID	Bone marrow depression	Sioril
Piperazine	Anti-worms	Nerve damage	Piperazine, Helmazan
Quiniodochlor	Anti-diarrhoeal	Damage to sight	Enteroquinol
Rosiglitazone maleate	Anti-diabetic	Liver failure, hepatitis, heart failure	Avandia
Cerivastatin	Anti-hyperlipidemic	Fatal rhabdomyolysis	Baycol

Retarded / Phocomelic Babies: A Social Challenge

Teratology is the study of abnormal development in embryos and the causes of congenital malformations or birth defects. Congenital malformations account for approximately 20 % of deaths in the prenatal period. Approximately 3 % of newborn infants will have major malformations and another 3 % will have malformations detected later in life. Teratogenic agents cause approximately 7 % of congenital malformations. A teratogenic agent is a chemical, infectious agent, physical condition, or deficiency that, on fetal exposure, can alter fetal morphology or subsequent function. Teratogenicity depends upon the ability of the agent to cross the placental barrier. The embryo is most susceptible to teratogenic agents during periods of rapid differentiation. The stage of development of the embryo determines susceptibility to teratogens. One should quit smoking, drinking and bad habits as early as possible. They take away crucial years of your precious life. Their consumption results in Retarded / malformed / phocomelic babies. Phenytoin, alcohol and thalidomide represent a few examples of commonly consumed teratogens, which produce retarded / phocomelic babies.

Table 3: Few examples of Teratogens

Teratogens	Teratogenic effects
Alcohol	Low IQ babies, growth retardation
Aspirin	Premature closure of ductus arteriosus
Tetracycline	Discolored and deformed teeth
Phenytoin	Cleft palate
Large doses of Vitamin-A	Facial abnormalities

Effects of Media on Body-Fitness

Media can influence body image negatively. The electronic media (television, movies, magazines, etc.) are showing thin body images as ideal for women and muscular built as ideal for men. This gives a negative message among masses and the viewers adopt wrong methods to have thin or muscular bodies. They are more focused about their appearance rather than health. Similarly, they are becoming prey to eating disorders for having lean body structure. Due to this, the young generation TV viewers are suffering from diseases like anorexia nervosa, bulimia etc. The negative impact of TV models is not only confined to adults or teens but extended to children as well, because children and adolescents spend more time with media, while skipping the normal exercise inducing activities. Media can influence children's beliefs and behaviors. Excessive television viewing has been linked with attention-deficit disorder, diminished academic performance, hypertension, asthma, sleep disorders, mood disorders, psychological distress and depression. On the other hand, media can influence health of the society in a positive manner by displaying rationale methods of healthy lifestyle. Population control camps are organized by district

health authorities in India with the help of social as well as mass media. Media plays a very important part in educating rural population and in combating various health related problems like infant mortality, diarrhea, organizing immunization camps, teaching health related skills and promoting sanitation programmes. Theatrical performances by professional artists educate people about AIDS and create awareness about other non-communicable and communicable diseases. Similarly, puppetry shows organized at school levels could have massive beneficial effects. Thus, media has a great potential to safeguard the health of the society, when it is channelized in a careful manner, while giving top priority to health issues.

Concluding Remarks

Media plays an important role in creating awareness nowadays. Media should realize that health/body fitness stands above all commercial profits; newspapers, magazines and pamphlets, whether in written or printed form are covered under print media, whereas radio, television, internet and mobiles are included under electronic media. Vague, sensational terms such as miracle, breakthrough or wonder drugs may harm news consumers by misleading and misinforming them. In any case, coverage of health related news by media as of today is generally of poor quality. Media has a unique quality of reaching a large segment of population within a short span of time. The Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisement) Act was passed by Government of India in 1954 to control the false advertisements of drugs and to prohibit the advertisements of remedies possessing magical qualities alleged to cure certain diseases such as cancer, AIDS, diabetes, baldness, sexual impotence etc. Some of the internationally banned drugs such as Nimesulide, Rofecoxib, Phenylpropanolamine, Analgin, Pioglitazone etc., banned for their serious side-effects are readily available in the Indian market. Furthermore, consumption of medicines, which cross the placental barrier (teratogens) might result in formation of retarded / malformed / phocomelic babies. Phenytoin, alcohol and thalidomide represent a few examples of commonly consumed teratogens, which produce retarded / phocomelic babies. While the professions of journalism and medicine, both have well-defined standards to encourage accuracy, moral values, fairness, and balanced writing, the combined process unfortunately sometimes yields a product, which conforms neither to the ideals of good science nor to good reporting, when journalists and scientists interact. Recently, Media has done a wonderful job by making a common man aware about the expiry date of goods. This noble initiative can also be extended to medicines, which would help in saving several innocent lives. Furthermore, there are a few physicians, who are unable to keep themselves up-to-date due

to patient rush and ambitious lifestyle. Pioglitazone, a powerful anti-diabetic medicine, analgin, a promising pain killer and de-anxit, an anti-depressant/anti-anxiety drug have all been banned recently by Drugs Controller General of India for their serious adverse effects. A common man, who is busy in earning his daily bread, needs to be informed about these Banned Drugs.

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