

## Role of Health Communication in Curbing Coronavirus Pandemic in Nigeria

Waba Indagiju Lawi, Suleiman Balluwa and Keziah James

Department of Languages and Communication, Federal Polytechnic, Mubi.

---

### ABSTRACT

The impact of COVID- 19 on vulnerable group rely in part on the quality of communication regarding health risk and danger. Strategic planning should take full account of the way life conditions, cultural values, and risk experience affect actions during a pandemic. Concept of information, education, communication, Social behavior changes communication. Ignorance with sociocultural, economic, psychological, and health factors can jeopardize effective communication at all levels. Understanding and practicing various communication strategies is crucial for physicians and health care workers to develop therapeutic relationships with COVID-19 patients and the general populace. Addressing psychology in all people is vital during a pandemic and effective communication network is key to it. This paper conceptualizes Covid-19, Health Communication and its implication in fighting a pandemic. If ignored, it will generate gaps for vulnerable populations and result in added difficulty in combating COVID- 19 pandemic. The study tries to proffer solution to the challenges of infodemics and also suggest the effectiveness of health communication during pandemic and its role i.e. education, socialization etc.

Keywords: Health Communication, Corona, Covid 19, Infodemic, Pandemic.

---

### INTRODUCTION

We live in a world of interesting parallels where we have access to more information than any previous generation, but at the same time we're plagued by fake news and misinformation [1,2]. Separating truth from outright falsehoods can be a daunting task, especially in the era of social media, and what the World Health Organization (2020) has termed the world's first infodemic an overabundance of information some accurate and some not -that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it [3]. While the threat of COVID-19 has triggered a serious global health concern, a great deal of the fear surrounding the disease is being fueled by widespread misinformation. Health communication is a key and necessary factor in saving lives during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis [4]. Accurate and well-developed health communication can facilitate how

societies handle uncertainty and fear, promote and accomplish adherence to necessary behavior change, and meet individuals' fear and foster hope in the face of a crisis [5]. Professionals in the fields of health communication, patient education, and health behavior change have a special responsibility to contribute to the spread of concise and valid information in different contexts [6]. Environmental, and indeed all facets of lives have been impacted like never before in recent decades. Nigeria has recorded about fifty thousand (50,000) confirmed cases with nine hundred and seventy four (974) deaths as at August 2020 [7]. In response to the pandemic, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) emplaced measures such as the constitution of a Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID 19, total lockdown of the country including closing airports, schools and commercial centers as well as land borders, institution of protocols and

guidelines among others [8]. The efforts of the FGN have to some extent contained the spread of the virus to a manageable proportion with improved recovery rates and fewer deaths recorded [9,10,11]. Despite the measures, Nigeria continues to witness the spread of the pandemic especially community transmissions

which is adversely affecting the lives and livelihood of the people and it can only be flattened with the aid of effective health communication [12,13,14]. The impact of COVID 19 on the people in Nigeria cut across social, economic, political and erosion of livelihoods as well as the curtailment of human rights.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Infodemic is a major problem when fighting a pandemic. A lot of people get information from different sources either accurate or not, false or truth which affects the battle against the disease. The choice of information gathering and

sharing is a set back to the war on covid-19 if the message is not accurate and effective. This study unravels the effectiveness of health communication in curtailing the pandemic in Nigeria.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

##### Corona Virus

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is defined as illness caused by a novel coronavirus now called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2; formerly called 2019-nCoV), a mild to severe respiratory illness that is caused by a coronavirus (Severe acute respiratory

syndrome coronavirus 2 of the genus Betacoronavirus), is transmitted chiefly by contact with infectious material such as respiratory droplets, and is characterized especially by fever, cough, and shortness of breath and may progress to pneumonia and respiratory failure [8].

##### Health Communication

Health communication can be defined as any type of human communication whose content is concerned with health [9]. For health communication to be effective there is need for proper enlightenment through accurate language which is the basis of information. Information is fundamental to choice and making informed decisions. Without information, there is no choice because it gives patients and the general public the power and confidence to engage as partners with health service [10]. As the pandemic has developed, the need to provide clear, honest and valid information to the public all over the world has become obvious, as expressed in a February editorial in the Lancet, concluding that "There may be no way to prevent a COVID-19 pandemic in this globalized time, but verified information is the most effective prevention against the disease [12]. Political leaders and health experts have a special responsibility to provide us

with accurate information, and to implement measures that require behavior change to fight the pandemic. However, in the near chaotic flow of information, each and every one of us, in different roles and with different responsibilities, may contribute to improve the flow of information and debate on COVID-19.

Health communication is the study and practice of communicating promotional health information, such as in public health campaigns, health education, and between doctor and patient [8]. The purpose of disseminating health information is to influence personal health choices by improving health literacy. They opine that, it is a unique niche in healthcare that allows professionals to use communication strategies to inform and influence decisions and actions of the public to improve health. Health is undoubtedly, after life, the value that people appreciate

most. It is an area where effective communication contributes to virtually all aspects of health care [9]. Health communication encompasses the study of communication strategies to inform and influence individual and community decisions that enhance health. It links the domains of communication and health and is increasingly recognized as a necessary element of efforts to improve personal and public health [10,12,13,14]. Health communication contributes in controlling diseases, informing the public on diseases and prevention of diseases and health related issues.

The language of health offers stimulating material for deep understanding of the linguistics of health [5]. There is a substantial body of evidence that shows that patients who are dealt with by Healthcare providers with good communication skills have better health outcomes [8,8,9].The converse, in effective communication, whether at the individual health professional or wider public health level, can lead to patients not even engaging with the healthcare system, refusing to follow recommended advice or to adhere to treatments.Health communication according to Fakuade (2008) is relevant in the various contexts:

#### Importance of Health Communication during Pandemic

The following are the importance of health communication stated by [8]:

1. Increase audience knowledge and awareness of a health issue.
2. Influence behaviors and attitudes toward a health issue
3. Demonstrate healthy practices

1. Health professional- patient relations;
2. Individuals' exposure to health information;
3. Individuals' adherence to clinical recommendations and regimens;
4. The construction of public health messages;
5. The dissemination of individual and population health risk information;
6. Images of health in mass media.

[9], note that communication is pervasive in creating, gathering and sharing of health information. It is a central human process that enables individual and collective adaptation to health risk at many different levels. This is realizable because the language of health offers stimulating material for deep understanding of the linguistics of health [7]. For health communication to be effective there is need for proper enlightenment through proper usage of language. Information is fundamental to choice and making informed decisions. Without information, there is no choice because it gives patients and the general public the power and confidence to engage as partners with health service [10].

4. Demonstrate the benefits of behavior changes to public health outcomes
5. Advocate a position on a health issue or policy
6. Increase demand or support for health services
7. Argue against misconceptions about health

#### Factors Affecting Effective Communication

Effective communication is proactive, polite, imaginative, innovative, creative, constructive, professional, progressive, energetic, enabling, and transparent and technology friendly. However, there are multiple factors playing a key role in

accepting information, like social and cultural characteristics. Gender, generational contrasts, language inclinations, strict convictions, religious beliefs, and varying literacy influence the action of masses [8]. Difficulty and

attitudes towards initiatives in public health communication is crucial to improving awareness and eventually acceptability or unacceptability of government advisories. Presence of treatment, and vaccines have significant consequences for vulnerable people as it would allow individuals and organizations to take decisions and acts that may be incompatible with their health beliefs and

values during a pandemic. Individuals with minimal financial resources needing to work on a daily basis may have trouble following advice to stay at home. Reliability, affordability, accessibility, availability, and appropriate use of personal protective equipment are key concerns from health care workers to common man.

#### ROLE OF HEALTH COMMUNICATION IN COVID-19

The pivotal roles that communication plays in the current pandemic is promoting physical and psychological health measures and ensuring resilience in people belonging to different age groups and socioeconomic conditions [4]. In COVID-19, it is a prerequisite to ensure public knowledge regarding stemming the outbreak through:

1. Information: This is facts provided or learned about something or someone. It is a resolution of uncertainty that answers the question of what an entity is and thus defines both its essence and the nature of its characteristics (venkatashiva & Gupta, 2020). It is a knowledge communicated or received concerning a particular fact or circumstances. Eg daily updates on Covid 19 by Worldometer and PTF, advertisements and jingles on Covid 19.
2. Education: Education is the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge by developing powers of reasoning and judgment. It is the process of facilitating learning or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, morals, beliefs and habits (Vaughan & Tinker, 2009). Due to illiteracy and culture, health communication aided in equipping most of the populace on what the disease is and how the spread can be curtailed. This can be

emphasized i.e. by educating the populace on using of facemask, observing social distancing etc.

3. Enlightenment: This refers to the full comprehension of a situation. The term is commonly used to denote understanding in a context or situation (Bedford, Farrar, Ihekweazu, Kang, Koopmans & Nkengasong, 2019). They believe it's synonymous with education but slightly differs because emphasis is on comprehension. The audience are mostly persuaded in this scenario to change their perception about certain beliefs or customs. During the pandemic a lot of fake news were in circulation and to change perception, effective health communication is solution. E.g. the use of contact tracing helped in changing the perception of many because they felt the disease was at their door steps. Also the daily updates on the casualties played a vital role.
4. Socialization: This refers to the activity of mixing socially with others. It is the process of learning to behave in a way that is acceptable to society. Socialization is a lifelong process through which people learn the values and norms of a given society (Ngamsa, 2010). The pandemic created a new community for the populace and a

new way of life there by making it difficult to adjust but it became easier with effective health communication through the following rules: Lockdown, wearing of mask, self-isolation etc.

5. Sensitization: Sensitization is the process of making somebody/something more aware of something, especially a problem or anything bad. It refers to a non-

associative learning process through which repeated exposure to a stimulus results in the progressive complication of the reaction to the stimulus (Ngamsa, 2010). This can be achieved speedily through effective health communication. For instance the issues arising from the vaccine can only be solved through proper communication.

#### CONCLUSION

COVID-19 is a global crisis that has spread throughout the world at a dangerously fast pace. The COVID-19 pandemic is accompanied by an Infodemic a spread of disinformation and misinformation making it difficult to find accurate life-saving information. Accurate information about COVID-19 such as on hygiene, physical distance, quarantine and prevention must reach everyone, including indigenous people and language users. This can only be achieved through effective Health Communication which plays a huge role in circulating information that influences the public behavior and can curtail the spread of disease. The threat of COVID-19 has triggered a serious global health concern, a great deal of the fear surrounding the disease is being fueled by widespread

misinformation. We live in a world of interesting parallels where we have access to more information than any previous generation, but at the same time we're plagued by fake news and misinformation. Separating truth from outright falsehoods can be a daunting task, especially in the era of social media. Health communication can curb infodemic. That is an overabundance of information — some accurate and some not — that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it. With effective health communication, people would be able to unmask mitigating devices in communication and also unearth truth / accurate information from false ones that can be useful in nipping the disease in the bud.

#### REFERENCES

1. Bedford J., Farrar J., Ihekweazu C., Kang G., Koopmans M., & Nkengasong J. (2019). A new twenty-first century science for effective epidemic response. *Nature*, 575, 130-136. Retrieved from [PMC free article] PubMed , March, 2021.
2. Berry, D. (2007). *Health Communication theory and Practice*. England: Berkshire university press.
3. Fakuade, G. (2008). Achieving Millennium Development Goals through Effective Health Communication Strategies. *Journal of language, culture and communication* 1(6).
4. Kreps, G. L, Bonaguro, E. W. & Querry, J.L (1998): *The history and development of the field of health communication Research: a Guide to Development and Directions*. London: Greenwood press.
5. Lancet, (2020). COVID-19: Fighting panic with information. 295:537. Retrieved from [PMC free article] [PubMed], June, 2021.

6. Ngamsa, J. (2010). Health Promotion and HIV/Aids: A mass media perspective *International journal of social science* 2(8).
7. Pugh, R. (1996). *Effective Language in Health and Social Work*. London: Chapman and Hall.
8. Rogers, E.M. (1996). *The field of health communication networks: Towards a paradigm for research*. New York: Free press.
9. Shen L. (2010). Mitigating Psychological Reactance: The role of message-induced empathy in persuasion. *Human Communication Research*. 36, 397-422 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2010.01381>
10. Vaughan, E. & Tinker, T. (2009). Effective Health Risk Communication about Pandemic Influenza for Vulnerable Populations. *Amj Public HealthJournal* 99 (2) 324-329
11. Venkateshiva, R. B. & Gupta, A. (2020). Importance of Effective Communication during Covid-19 Infodemic. *A Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care* 9 (8), 3793-3796
12. Waba, I. L. (2016). The Linguistics Analysis of the Language of Science in Tell Magazine: A health communication discourse. *Jjournal of applied science and management, Federal Polytechnic, Mubi*. 15 (1), 107-114.
13. Wittgenstein, L. (1992). *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*. London: Routledge and Paul.
14. World Health Organization (2020). Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/mental-health-and-psychosocial-considerations-during-the-covid-19-outbreak> 16 March., 2021 Worldometer (2020).