

BOOK REVIEW OF “HEALTH COMMUNICATION: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE”

Raj Kiran DOLEY¹

¹Lecturer, District Institute of Education and Training, Sonitpur, India
Corresponding author: Raj Kiran Doley; e-mail: rajkiran.tezu@gmail.com

Author: Dr.(Ms.) Renata Schiavo

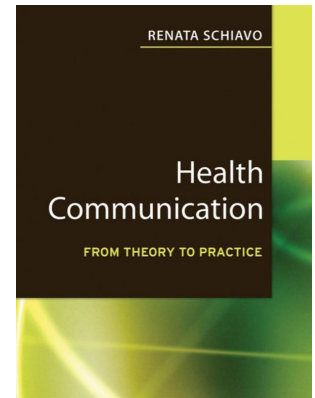
Publisher: Jossey-Bass

Printed at: USA

Year of Publication: 2007 (First Edition)

Price (2nd Edition): 7,365.75 (Kindle Edition), 26,263.31 (Paperback Edition)

No. of pages: 464



The book “Health Communication: From Theory to Practice” provides a comprehensive introduction to current issues and theories of health communication with a hands-on guide to program development and implementation. The book is primarily designed for students, professionals and organizations; however, it also includes advanced topics for health communication practitioners, public health experts, researchers, and health care providers with an interest in this field.

In this book, the author introduces health communication at the beginning by defining it as following: “Health communication is a multifaceted and multidisciplinary approach to reach different audiences and share health-related information with the goal of influencing, engaging, and supporting individuals, communities, health professionals, special groups, policymakers, and the public to champion, introduce, adopt, or sustain a behaviour, practice, or policy that will ultimately improve health outcomes”. This definition seems to have been formulated by combining different existing definitions and theories of health communication, and also by incorporating the author’s own understanding out of two decades of long experience in the field (WÜRZ et al., 2013). She also adds here that health communication is an evolving subject which should always incorporate lessons learned and

practical experiences. She emphasizes on the relevant theories of health issues that guide different health communication approaches. She says that the theoretical basis of health communication has been influenced by behavioural and social sciences, health education, social marketing, mass and speech communication, medical models, anthropology, and sociology. Her statement is correct in the sense that health communication is one of the fast-evolving developmental issues of the society, which starts from individual to the larger community (ROBINSON et al., 2014). Hence, all aspects mentioned above certainly influence the area of health communication, at least to some extent, if not entirely. The multidisciplinary nature of health communication is now recognized everywhere. The logic provided by the author is that theories, models and planning frameworks can influence different aspects and phases of health communication planning, evaluation and management. She has also highlighted on the different societal factors like cultural beliefs, race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic conditions, and geographical boundaries etc. which influence the conceptions of health and illness (THOMPSON, 2014).

That author states that, in the health communication process, interpersonal communication is considered to be an essential action area. It is highly influenced by cultural,

social, age and gender related aspects, as well as literacy levels, individual factors and attitudes. Her statement can be experienced in the fields of underdeveloped and developing nations while executing the public health programmes. Public Relations (PR) is another action area of health communication and an important component of many health communication programmes. PR strategies and activities can help create interest regarding an idea, behaviour, a product, or an organization among the different types of public. The author prominently states that PR is a relationship-based subject and practice. However, due to the significant influence of mass media on the public opinion and the potential for manipulation and misrepresentation, PR ethics should always be held at every level. Although the importance of PR is advocated by her, the actual field where PR can function effectively is the corporate world, but not the society comprising multiple and diverse communities with limited exposure to the PR tools (BERRY, 2007).

Talking about the community mobilizations, the author states that it is a key area of health communication that tries to empower communities to make the necessary changes for better health outcomes. It often starts with ordinary people and attempts to engage all different levels of people in the society. The potential impact of community mobilization is higher when several communities come together and work simultaneously in order to achieve social change. She mentions that the fundamental aspects of community mobilizations are – community skills building, community participation and autonomy. Constituency Relations is another key area of health communication, and a crucial component of all the other action areas of communication. It is commonly used in the public health, non-profit, and commercial sectors, as a fundamental area of communication.

According to the author, the planning of health communication is research based, and that is necessary for effective health

communication interventions. It is a fundamental stage of the communication cycle, which also includes implementation, monitoring, evaluation, feedback, and refinement. But, before any intervention, situation analysis is a fundamental step in programme planning, and should represent the foundation of health communication as well. After having prepared any health communication programme, more emphasis should be given to effective implementation, proper monitoring and action needed on evaluation report, which will help the programme achieve a higher rate of success (NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE, 2004).

The book has been able to cover all aspects of health communication and its approaches, such as interpersonal communication, public relations, community/ social mobilization, social marketing, communication for behavioural change, and others. The book is very much useful as a potential guide for students, researchers, professionals, policy makers and organizations in order to carry out health communication programmes in any field.

References

- BERRY, D. (2007) *Health Communication- Theory and Practice*. England: Open University Press.
- NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE (2004) *Making Health Communications Programmes Work*. Washington: US Department of Health & Human Services Press.
- THOMPSON, T. L., ed. (2014) *Encyclopedia of health communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- ROBINSON, M.N., TANSIL, K.A., ELDER, R.W., SOLER, R.E., LABRE, M.P., MERCER, S.L., EROGLU, D., BAUR, C., LYON-DANIEL, K., FRIDINGER, F., SOKLER, L.A., GREEN, L.W., MILLER, T., DEARING, J.W., EVANS, W.D., SNYDER L.B., VISWANATH, K.K., BEISTLE D.M., CHERVIN, D.D., BERNHARDT, J.M., RIMER, B.K. & Community Preventive Services Task Force. (2014) Mass Media Health Communication Campaigns Combined with Health-Related Product Distribution A Community Guide Systematic Review. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 47(3). pp. 360-371.
- WÜRZ, A., NURM U.-K. & EKDAHL, K. (2013) Enhancing the role of Health Communication in Prevention of Infectious diseases. *Journal of Health Communication*. 18, pp.1566-1571.