

Contribution 1:

Greetings to all participants. First allow to express special thanks to Srdjan Stakic for moderating this very interesting and informative forum and for Vicki Beck and Neal Baer for facilitating this week's topic.

I am Ziad Rifai, a UNFPA regional communication adviser working from Amman- Jordan, and I am glad to be part of this on-going knowledge and experience sharing forum.

I would like to comment on the pros and cons of working with existing TV shows vs. funding new ones. My experience in the region has generally led me to favour the first mode of operation. It is less costly and more manageable in cases where good script-writing skills are in short supply. It nonetheless runs the risk of superficially addressing the health concern. The second mode - Funding a drama series - provides a good opportunity for ensuring that the health messages are well integrated within the drama storyline, and that there would not be counter-messages (intended or unintended) within the series. The main challenge that we have faced, aside from securing the required funding, was the issue of sustainability. As soon as it became known that such a work has been funded by a development agency, many other producers in the region expected to be funded if they were to address similar health issues. In a number of countries in the region where such a practice has employed, the prevailing culture has become that "one gets paid to address health issues". A weakened sense of media social responsibility has resulted from such practices. Additionally, and depending on how developed the script writing skills were, the resulting drama tended to have more "education" than "entertainment" which affected its overall ratings. This is not to suggest dismissing the whole idea of funding a whole drama series or parts of it, but to approach it carefully and after studying the prevailing production culture.

As for your next question on utilizing existing TV production to reinforce other health awareness campaigns/activities, our experience in the region has been positive. In a number of countries and settings such production/storylines have been used to initiate community/group discussions around health issues. The potential for engaging people in discussion/reflections is quite promising. Such efforts are considerably enhanced by the presence of good moderators. Building the capacity of a team of moderators/animators would be needed to maximize the potential of such use.

Ziad Rifai [rifai@cstamman.org.jo]

+++++

Contribution 2:

Hello,

About the 'luck' of public health campaigns in the form of PSAs, let me just say that the impact the Truth Campaign has had among youth regarding the dangers and

Thursday, April 5, 2007

consequences of tobacco use, is incredible and probably a model to follow. I'm unaware whether they pay for placement during prime time TV, or whether their placement on TV has been sponsored by foundations like the Legacy Foundation, but their impact has been incredible.

I Coordinate a Health Education team working in School-based clinics in New York City (Upper Manhattan) and although the majority of our work is around reproductive health, we received a grant to do tobacco prevention work in the schools. When going into the classrooms to do presentations on the topic, most students already know tons just from watching the PSAs from the Truth Campaign. This, together with a saturation of anti-tobacco messages in the media in general (as well as a very conscious effort to make tobacco less available to people), has contributed to very low smoking rates, and declines in the use of tobacco.

Maybe we should learn from this?

I know that anything involving sex, especially in countries like the US, always become controversial and political. This just adds to our many difficulties in this venture. But we can -and have to!- keep trying.

Visibility and marketability are big things. Just look at what the NYC Condom has created:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/05/nyregion/05condoms.html>

I congratulate Mr. Bloomberg on this!

All the best,
Vanessa Brizuela [vab9017@nyp.org]

+++++