

Media and Health

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"The body is an instrument, the mind its function, the witness and reward of its operation."

George Santayana.

It is very important for the media to be a partner in national missions. They should highlight the positive aspects and provide solutions to difficult aspects through nationwide consultations. The national press definitely have to get transformed into a media of a billion people

--A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

(Former President Kalam's address at the Press Council of India during the celebrations of National Press Day, in New Delhi on November 16, 2006.)

History of Medicine

2000 BC : Here, eat this root.

1000 BC : That root is heathen. Here, say this prayer.

1805 AD : That prayer is superstition. Here, drink this potion.

1940 AD : That potion is snake oil. Here, swallow this pill.

1985 AD : That pill is ineffective. Here, take this antibiotic.

2000 AD : That antibiotic doesn't work anymore.
Here, eat this root.

--Anonymous

Nothing is more important than health for human happiness and the quality of life.

Yet, health is still virtually absent from public debates and democratic politics in India.

India's Health Scenario

India's health indicators are among the worst in the world.

Half of all Indian children are undernourished and half of all adult women suffer from Anaemia.*

*Source: National Family Health survey (1998-99)

India's Health Scenario

Health system and services in India is almost totally privatized

A ratio of GDP, public expenditure on health in India is among the lowest in the world — about one per cent.

India's Health Scenario

Only 15 per cent of total health expenditure in India is public expenditure; the rest is private expenditure

Country	Ratio of Public expenditure to Total health
Britain	85%
Europe	75%
Latin America	50%
East Asia	40%
India	15%

India's Health Scenario

In large parts of India, there are no public health facilities worth the name, except for female sterilization and polio immunization.

It is worth noting that even the rich in India often do not have access to decent health services.

Media coverage on health issues

Except for a few ethical main stream media, many features relating to health are passionately devoured initiating a fear and imagination that the reader could be suffering from some or all of the illnesses written about.

Media coverage on health issues

In fact few of them create “HYPOCHONDRIASIS” - a persistent preoccupation with the possibility of having some dreadful disease accompanied by regular and compulsive visits to various specialists.

Media coverage on health issues

The explosion of information on the Internet also has its flip side and has contributed, unwittingly to the distress of these individuals.

There is still a lack of enough useful coverage of health issues in the media.

Power of Media & Public Opinion

Health Habits of the masses are highly influenced by the exposure to various media.

Mass media can emphasize an individual standpoint concerning health habits.

Media is getting increasingly popular as a strategy for delivering preventive health messages.

Select medical cases hogging media blitzkrieg

It is a matter of concern that in some media the health coverage is all too often susceptible to manipulation that makes a mockery of the ethics of both the media and the medical profession.

Media coverage of certain cases raises a number of questions about whose "best interests" were served by the hype and hoopla.

Select medical cases hogging media blitzkrieg

"Miracle" surgeries continue to get media attention, making heroes of surgeons and institutions, and creating headlines for one in a million lucky enough to get some life-saving, high-tech, costly surgery.

Advertisements by Doctors

People are not only carried away by medical news contents, but also by advertisements.

Can a Doctor advertise for himself?

Advertisements by Doctors

According to Section 6.1 of the Indian Medical Council (Professional Conduct, Etiquette and Ethics) Regulations, 2002

"Soliciting of patients directly or indirectly, by a physician, by a group of physicians or by institutions or organisations is unethical.

Advertisements by Doctors

"A physician shall not make use of him/her (or his/her name) as subject of any form or manner of advertising or publicity through any mode either alone or in conjunction with others which is of such a character as to invite attention to him or to his professional position, skill, qualification, achievements, attainments, specialities, appointments, associations, affiliations or honours and/or of such character as would ordinarily result in his self aggrandisement."

Advertisements by Doctors

Although medical associations in some countries have relaxed their rules against advertising in recent times, most still have detailed guidelines on ethical advertising by physicians, focusing particularly on ensuring that it is not false or fraudulent and that it serves the interests of patients.

Health Coverage in Media

Health is a major topic with the media.

Several booklets on wellness are being published every now and then. Many newspapers have large columns allotted for health.

All TV channels have health programmes — discussions with doctors, tips on exercises. AIR also has several informative broadcasts.

Health has been elevated to the super-specialty realm.

Health Coverage in Media

Yoga is, of course, particularly popular these days and several papers regularly carry instructions on Yogasanas for various ailments.

But care must be taken to mention that such Yogic postures should not be attempted without proper guidance from trained Yoga professionals.

Of course a few articles with worthless advices on health also appear in some media.

Negatives of Media health coverage

We cannot deny the fact that at times the new media is falling over itself in supplying "newer health information" to the people. This leads to "information overkill" .

An overdose of articles has put fear in the minds of the people.

Negatives of Media health coverage

As far as the oil consumption in food is concerned, since the news coverage project oil as the enemy of good health, many are being denied the normal amount of oils and fats that are essential for the normal functioning of the human body.

Oils run the brain, skin defenses, sexual hormones, nerve conduction and much more. Healing of wounds also depends on oil and fat.

Negatives of Media health coverage

Clinicians can feel the loss of balance in thinking of people.

Today, we have normal patients who insist on having an ECG test. Simple acidity at night becomes a heart problem, with ICU admissions and relatives flying down from all over India.

Television and Health Coverage

Few hospital sponsored health programmes that appear in television with almost live demo of the surgeries performed, creates panic in the minds of people.

Though this is a way of informing public that there is a cure for a disease, in most cases it ends up in the publicity of the hospital or the doctors.

Television and Health Coverage

Many doctors of alternate medicines appear in Television with their patients and make their patients say that they have got complete cure for their health problems. Is this not a way of self-advertising or propaganda..?

Media coverage can influence on

- Lifestyle Diseases such as hypertension, obesity
- Sedentary living / Physical inactivity
- Nutritious diets
- Stress Management
- Psychological aspect of one's health

Media coverage can influence on

- Smoking / Tobacco use
- Awareness on illnesses such as heart disease, certain cancers, Diabetes etc
- Exercising and staying fit
- Awareness About the use of antibiotics
- Unhealthy choices made by people on day to day basis

Rising to the challenges

In order to help the people to make the desired changes in health perspective, the media must focus on the whole person - mind, body and spirit . The techniques of **MOTIVATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY** can play a great role here.

Rising to the challenges

Media can play the role of educating and motivating the people towards a healthy, vibrant life that is ultimately based on **PERSONAL CHOICES.**

Media must try to create shifts in public opinion on health and open up the space for reality.

Rising to the challenges

We may only be as healthy as our planet and community. The mass media has definitely its duty towards a safe planet.

By right combination with the *GODS OF GOOD HEALTH* media can bring out the change.

Media can be a partner in the anti-AIDS battle- The AIDS pandemic is one where the media has an important role, and may even save more lives, than doctors.

Vision of health

Health is clearly a matter of great public interest as well as considerable, legitimate individual self-interest.

Under the circumstances it is mandatory that media coverage of health-related events and issues must not be ad hoc, haphazard and superficial.

Vision of health

The brave new world of health will be a complex landscape offering many avenues to travel.

It would be a pleasure to conclude that tomorrow in India, health will be a democratic domain, and that access, affordability, convenience and quality to good care will be realized in the future.

Health is definitely not a matter of luck, but of smart choices and healthy living practices, so let us eat right, exercise and take time to smell the roses.



Best wishes for a happy and healthy life to one and all!

Thank you.