

THE GROWING VACCINE HESITANCY - COMMUNICATION ASPECTS AND CHALLENGES

Mitja Vrdelja

National Institute of Public Health, Slovenia

Vaccination has significantly contributed to the reduction of mortality and morbidity caused by vaccine preventable diseases. But nowadays many people underestimate their infectiveness and the potential damage they can cause. And the fact is, that more and more people hesitate or even reject vaccinations. The other fact is that people are increasingly taking care of their own health, want to be informed, and seek information from different sources. They are progressively using the Internet for health issues. As a result, public trust in vaccination has decreased in several countries, including Slovenia.

And as the influence of the internet grows, the question becomes how to communicate about vaccination to parents, especially mothers, who have the highest influence on the decision whether to vaccinate their children or not. Beside that there are differences between mothers, which is why it makes sense to segment them in order to research their profiles, standpoints and attitude towards vaccination and thus establish where and how communication with them on the topic of vaccination is possible.

How to do it? Answer would be with using the Situational Theory of Publics (STOP), which enables the identification of communicative behavior of individual population groups. This theory enables the establishing of the extent these groups communicate a certain topic actively or passively, or do not communicate it at all. STOP distinguishes four types of public: nonpublic, latent, aware, and active public; all of them foresee active and passive communication. If we presume that each of the independent variables has a low and high value, we can split publics into eight different groups.

Communication has a substantial influence on attitudes toward vaccination. Poor or inappropriate communication can lower the vaccination coverage and contributes to hesitation of vaccination. There is a huge need for intensive professional communication about vaccination on the internet and social media. The improvement of the communicational competences of doctors and healthcare workers is essential to achieve better communication with parents and the media, and needs to be focused on mothers and pregnant women.

BIOGRAPHY

Mitja Vrdelja has a master degree of public relations and is a PhD candidate in the field of public relations. Currently he is working at Slovenian National institute of public Health, where he is a head of Communication department. He daily encounters communicating health topics and communication with different stakeholders as well as other various fields of communication – internal communication, media relations, crisis communication, risk communication, strategic communication, corporate communication, etc. As a Slovenian representative, he cooperates in various working groups of European institutions: European Food Safety Agency (EFSA); European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC); European Commission. He is interested in researching of health communication, especial he is focusing on vaccine communication.

mitja.vrdelja@nijz.si



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