A SURVEY ON 'PRACTISING HEALTHY LIFESTYLE' BY BEHAVIOUR CHANGE COMMUNICATION THROUGH EMAIL

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CONTEXT: One of the most difficult tasks of behavioural scientist and health educator is changing individuals or group behaviour. It is even more difficult to help individuals or groups to maintain the behaviour once it is changed. The efforts of all health care professionals should be to educate the individuals/community as well as to socialize the concept of physically active life style through behaviour change communication. The new means of computer based communication system has opened vast capability of transfer of knowledge and made it possible to get into direct & instant communication across the world by means of internet. **MATERIALS AND METHODS:** The practice of healthy life style was studied among friends, relatives, colleagues and others through email by behaviour change communication. The material on Healthy Life Style was prepared based on scientific knowledge with included references and forwarded to 200 people through email. The feedback was requested in questionnaire form after 15 months of practising healthy life. Social mobilization is required through structured behavioural change communication specially enhancing awareness and promoting attitude towards positive health among target audience and viewers leading to modified behaviour. **RESULTS:** Observations were analysed by simple statistical method, 22% people responded after repeated follow-up thru email and telephone-calls. Of the respondents, 72% felt energetic, 45% reduced weight, 27.5% reduced lipid profile, 25% had less stress, 17.5% reduced alcohol, 12.5% reduced smoking and 10% had better sexual life. Most of the people i.e. 96% further spread this message to others. **CONCLUSION:** The internet is an impotent medium to teach healthy life style by behaviour change communication, though only about 22% responded but the results were quite encouraging.

INTRODUCTION: Healthy Lifestyle is defined as patterns of behaviour that maximize one's quality of life and decrease one's susceptibility to negative outcomes. [1] Physicians play a catalytic role in improving the life style of people who they come in contact with. An initial counselling session of 5-7 min followed by periodic telephone call to keep the motivation has been quite successful. [2] The efforts of all health care professionals should be to educate the individuals/community as well as to socialize the concept of physically active life style. The new means of computer based communication system has opened vast capability of transfer of knowledge and made it possible to get into direct & instant communication across the world by means of internet. [3] Behaviour change communication was first employed in HIV and TB prevention, more recently its ambit has increased to encompass any communication activity whose goal is to help individuals/ community and practice behaviour that will positively impact their health. [4] Mark Edberg has written that Social network theory is most powerful in health promotion as a strategy to use surprisingly, for relatively limited or defined group of people. It is not for a mass or large population intervention. [5] The

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Centre for Disease Control and Prevention located in Atlanta is the single source for obtaining accurate, timely, consistent, and science based information by telephone and email. [6]

Based on the above information, the author shared the healthy life style practices among friends and relatives and encouraged them to adopt it through constant communication over email and telephone.

MATERIAL AND METHODS: According to Robert J. Bensley, practicing community health education is the most important quality of health professionals who possess useful knowledge and skills based on education of exceptional duration and difficulty. [7] The author has written a booklet on healthy life style in Jan 2000, and distributed it to his friends, relatives and officers of Armed Forces. He distributed almost 500 free copies by 2010, till he retired from Army. The author was encouraged with the overwhelming response received for the booklet. He also started engaging people in social gatherings and through phone. After joining the Medical College in beginning of 2011, as an academican, he upgraded the health material and made it more interesting with pictures and charts etc, appealing and scientifically accurate with references. The article on healthy lifestyle was posted online at <http://sdrv.ms/XEke29>. The e-mail addresses of about 250 people were collected and material was tested among 25 close relatives and friend. Finally, 200 people were short listed after identifying their view and careful observations based on their education, knowledge, attitude, beliefs, media habits, their health behaviour etc. [8] The latest amended Healthy life style article was forwarded to these 200 people from months of February to April 2012 and they were also contacted by phone to encourage practice of healthy life style regularly. A questionnaire to assess adoption of healthy lifestyle practices was prepared, while keeping in mind the relevance and feasibility of questions and sent using 'Survey Monkey'. The feedback was requested by June to August 2013 from 200 people after a gap of 15 months from the date of sharing the article and responses were studied.

The questionnaire is given below.

Feedback on the article "Healthy Lifestyle"

1. Have you read this article?
 - a. Completely
 - b. Partially
 - c. Not at all
2. If read, have you adopted any change in these aspects for a healthier lifestyle?
 - a. Exercise
 - b. Meditation
 - c. Nutrition
 - d. Alcohol
 - e. Smoking
 - f. Sexual life
3. If any of these aspects is adopted/practiced by you, have you benefited from them?
 - a. Yes, I reduced my weight.
 - b. Yes, I feel more energetic.
 - c. Yes, My lipid profile looks better.
 - d. Yes, I reduced / stopped smoking.
 - e. Yes, I reduced/ stopped alcohol-consumption.
 - f. Yes, I reduced stress through meditation.
 - g. Yes, I have a better sexual life.
4. Will you recommend these methods to your family/friends?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. Have you forwarded it to your relatives? If yes then to how many?

6. If you forwarded then did you generally receive a positive feedback?
 a. Yes b. No
7. Please provide your feedback on the article.

RESULTS: Observations have been analysed by simple statistical method

Figure 1: Response to Question #1

Answer Choices	Responses
Completely	75% 33
Partially	20.45% 9
Not at all	4.55% 2
Total	44

Figure 2: Response to Question #2

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Answer Choices	Responses	
Exercise	77.27%	34
Meditation	29.55%	13
Nutrition	54.55%	24
Alcohol	11.36%	5
Smoking	9.09%	4
Sexual life	6.82%	3
None	6.82%	3
Total Respondents: 44

Figure 3: Response to Question #3

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes, I reduced my weight	45%	18
Yes, I feel more energetic	72.50%	29
Yes, my lipid profile looks better	27.50%	11
Yes, I reduced/stopped smoking	12.50%	5
Yes, I reduced/stopped alcohol-consumption	17.50%	7
Yes, I reduced stress thru meditation	25%	10
Yes, I have a better sexual life.	10%	4
Total Respondents: 40		

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Figure 4: Response to Question #4

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	97.62%	41
No	2.38%	1
Total		42

Figure 5: Response to Question #5

Answer Choices	Average Number	Total Number	Responses
No. of people you forwarded the article to	7.00	217	31
Total Respondents: 31

Figure 6: Response to Question #6

Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	69.70% 23
No	30.30% 10
Total	33

DISCUSSION: Out of 200 individuals only 31(15.5%) have given feedback after practising healthy lifestyle measures for full 15 months. They were also reminded telephonically to practise these methods regularly. As per National Research Council of National Academies Washington “Getting people to develop and maintain healthier pattern of living involves the issue of motivation. How to get people to perform and maintain behaviour that are in their own best interest but can be bothersome or difficult to do such as eating properly, exercise, moderating bad habits, following through doctor’s directive. Understanding the myriad factors that promote and maintain change is daunting but crucial enterprise. Even people say that they want to change, procrastination and acceptance of the status quo are common place.” [9] After three months, feedback was requested from those who did not reply earlier and total number of respondents increased from 31 to 44. Sustained healthy behaviour requires continuing investment in behaviour change communication which led to increase practitioners tally to 44. Responses were very positive and encouraging. The healthy life style article was read by 76% people completely and by 20.5% partially. Most of them adopted changes in exercise [77%] followed by nutrition (54%) and meditation (29.5%). Many people were benefitted and felt more energetic (72.5%), followed by reduction in weight (45%), reduction in lipid profile (27.5%) and reduction in stress through meditation (25%), reduction in alcohol intake (17.5%), reduction in smoking (12.5%) and better sexual life 10% . According to Robert B Wallace electronic approaches allow repeated and more frequent contact without need for

transportation to central health care provider location, thereby enhancing compliance and producing greater changes in other behaviour of interest e.g. physical activity and cessation of smoking. [10] Almost all i.e. 97.6% recommended these methods to be adopted by their families and friends and 31 have already forwarded it to their 217 friends and relatives and 70% of them received positive response. 73% people who commented on article have graded it as good to excellent. Editor of Oxford Textbook of Public Health has recognized that the creation and diffusion of knowledge is one of the major driving forces for health progress and improving health equity. [11]

CONCLUSION: Health education material has been prepared by author and his direct interaction with respondents has given encouraging results. Of the 22% that responded, most of them have been benefitted in doing exercise, meditation and taking nutritious food. Almost all persons recommended these methods to their families and friends and got good response. Thus a tree of health education has been planted and it would further spread its branches among other individuals in the society. The objective of health education has been achieved to adopt healthy life style and encourage respondents to change their attitude towards their own health and to improve health of family & community. Robert J and Bensley discussed that the cognitive behaviour theory is based on two premises, first behaviour is determined by cognition or what we know, which in turn, results in how we act and second behaviour is determined by perception, levels of motivation, self efficiency, skills, resiliency and environment. [7] Though health professionals are involved in providing health care to people and community but they are requested to do it in organized and more systematic manner. Lifestyle is developed in the form of set pattern of behaviour, very gradually, over many years, in the way we eat, drink, exercise, use of alcohol etc. Since these behaviour patterns are acquired very gradually, changing them becomes a difficult proposition and need persuasiveness as well as persistent appeal on part of healthcare providers.

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