

HOW DO WE GET MESSAGES THAT PROMOTE A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE ACROSS?

We thank Leong and Chia for their interesting article, "Prevalence of cardiovascular risk factors among healthcare staff in a large healthcare institution in Singapore", published in a recent issue of the *SMJ*.⁽¹⁾ The authors rightly pointed out that messages promoting a healthy lifestyle should be modified in such a way that both non-health workers (NHWs) and health workers (HWs) would be able to understand and internalise. We wish to make additional comments regarding health-related messages.

Firstly, a combination of emotional and rational messages geared toward the specific target group is essential. An overall communication concept intended to promote health should include both positively as well as negatively framed messages.⁽²⁾ However, since positive, gain-framed messages seem to work slightly better with regard to a change in attitude and behaviour, such messages should be brought to the forefront.^(3,4)

Secondly, the message must be simple and flexibly implementable in everyday life.⁽²⁾ Generally, health-related messages that are clear, simple and understandable in their wording, with the use of concrete and vivid language, would be more easily remembered, e.g. "Add 1,000 steps to achieve 10,000 daily steps."^(4,5) While such a message needs to be balanced enough for those who are familiar with or even overloaded with information on the health topic concerned, it also needs to have an appeal of newness and uniqueness, in order to attract the recipient's attention.⁽²⁾ A message tailored to address a type 2 diabetic could read "Exercise lowers your blood sugar level more efficiently than any prescription drug."

Thirdly, the relationship between the sender/communicator and the recipient includes a large number of potential components that can change the desired effect considerably. If the communicator does not appear to be trustworthy, credible, attractive or likeable, resistance may be triggered on the part of the recipient. As for the recipients, it is particularly important to consider such personality factors as self-efficacy beliefs, locus of control, involvement, cost-benefit balance, and their social environment and standards.⁽²⁾

In conclusion, it should be said that in view of the complexity of this topic, messages promoting a healthy lifestyle, which are meant to have a long-term, convincing impact on both NHWs and HWs, should definitely be associated with happiness and enjoyment, such as in the phrase "Enjoy better health by climbing stairs". It's all about the desire to experience a successful lifestyle.

Yours sincerely,
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