Community Involvement In Health Communication

The present human generation exist in what they call extraordinary times. The emergence of advanced mass media and technology has played a greater role in the enhancement of health and social conclusions for communities. Despite these advances, communities are still one of the most important stakeholders of health. Thus collaborative voices in decision making are one of the best strategies in improving healthy sustainable practices. This essay will seek to discuss the importance of community involvement for effective Health Communication.

A community is a social unit made up of families living in the same terrestrial area sharing common goals or problems with comparable development objectives and a common method of communication. A community indicates a variety of social, ethnic, cultural or geographical associations. (Schiavo 2016). Community Involvement is a process whereby a community activates its resources, initiatives and takes full responsibility for its own development activities. Community involvement occurs when communities participate in the decision making process and implement relevant programmes to improve their health status. Through the process of community participation, people gain greater control of the social, economic and environmental factors affecting their health. (Parker 2009)

Health communication refers to the process of promoting health by publicizing messages to communities. It includes verbal and written strategies to influence and empower individuals and communities to make the right choices regarding their health. It is also referred to as “the art and technique of informing, influencing and motivating individual about important health issues” (Office of the Disease Prevention and Health Promotion 2016)

To begin with, community involvement in health communication provides a sense of responsibility. Communities have detailed knowledge about their surroundings and everyday life. It is significant to involve communities because they are familiar with local conditions and possibilities for change. If communities are involved in choosing priorities and be part of the decision-making process, it gives them a sense of responsibility towards the task of improving health statuses. This means that communities willingly participate to improve health status. It empowers them to make wise decisions in matters determining their health. A very good example is Fiji, during the wake of the global crisis COVID 19 whereby most communities adhered to the guidelines enlightened by the Ministry of Health whereby staying home was not just an obligation but a responsibility that will save not only them but the lives of others. Fijians became responsible for their own lives through practicing good hygiene like hand washing. Members of the community volunteered through the Fiji Red Cross Society and other Non-Government Organizations, Civil Servants at District Levels, assisted in disseminating information through ways of preventing the stop of this deadly virus. This was indeed successful as evident by an article in The Fiji Sun dated the 19th of May 2020 “No New Case of COVID-19 For Fiji In Past 30 Days” (Rabonu, 2020)

Moreover, the involvement of communities in health communication will develop and enhance self-reliance, self-care and problem-solving skills. Self-Reliance is the ability to do and make decisions on one’s own rather than relying on others. Members of the community become enthusiastic through the level of participation rendered during community involvement. This

leads to self-reliance as one is able to anticipate the benefits of adhering to tips and advice. A very good example is during the Measles outbreak in Samoa in 2019 where traditional healers were visited to cure measles patients despite of available vaccines in the hospital. This flooded the news and made Fijians realise the importance of being vaccinated against measles, even though a small proportion of the population contracted the disease. Fijians willingly visited outreach clinics and welcomed house to house outreach health officials to be immunized against Measles. This is self-reliance. Based on what they have seen in the news, heard over the radios, communities willingly make decisions for the betterment of their own lives. Collectively, Fiji Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee (FASANOC) and the Ministry of Youth and Sports supported the Ministry of Health as published in The Fiji Sun dated 4th of December 2019- “Postpone All Games” (Haravanua, 2019) In addition Fijians were able to make their own decision for their own health and safety. A press release by the Ministry of Health on the 22nd of November 2019 acknowledged the response of the public in presenting to health facilities for measles vaccines. (Chandra 2019)

Furthermore, community involvement in health communication develops critical awareness. Critical Awareness is an active, persistent and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge (Dewey & Suzzallo 1909). Critical awareness is when individuals use existing knowledge and information to make informed choices. It allows individuals to be informed and be aware of matters affecting their health at the same time giving them a chance to make the right choices. (Flay 1987) evaluates the effectiveness of mass media programs to influence cigarette smoking. An example of this could be the pictorial warning that appear on Cigarette Packets here in Fiji. English texts appear on the front cover while bilingual texts (Hindi and I Taukei) are written at the back cover. This is a type of awareness that involves the community to increase intentions not to smoke or to quit smoking. It specifies negative impacts of smoking which is clearly depicted in pictorial form. Communities are made aware of the impacts and as a result they are expected to make knowledgeable decisions about their health.

In addition to the above, community involvement in health communication fosters a better relationship between health workers and the community. Community participation promotes a trusting relation between the stakeholders. This is evident in community’s willingness to adhere health advices by health workers. An example could be the nomination of village nurses in rural areas to support the Ministry of Health and its officials carry out and disseminate relevant information to and about the village. This also could mean that communities begin to understand their health status and trust the information disseminated by the health worker.

In conclusion, it can be stated that community involvement is a vibrant tool in health communication. Not only does it install a sense of responsibility, it also allows communities to be self-reliant and be critical in decision making. It also builds trust between the health workers and the communities. Community involvement is now seen as a way of rapidly improving the health services locally and globally. When communication is used intentionally to circulate messages related to health, individuals are made aware of the diseases, they are encouraged to adopt health practices and are empowered to make healthier choices in life.