



THE ROLE OF HEALTH COMMUNICATION IN COMBATING PROSTATE CANCER AMONG MEN IN IMO STATE, IN NIGERIA

¹AKU, George

²UKONU, Michael Chimeze

^{1,2}Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Communication Studies, Imo State University, Owerri

Corresponding Author: Aku, George, Email: ponabocia@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Health communication is strategic in the prevention and management of prostate cancer at national and global levels. This study set out to assess the role of health communication in tackling prostate cancer among men in Imo state. This study focuses on Imo state with an increasing number of prostate cancer patients. The survey design was used to elicit data for the study. A total of 340 respondents from Imo state were randomly selected using the multistage sample procedure. The findings show that the internet was the major source of information and knowledge on prostate cancer 151 (44.4%) while health care givers followed with 44 (13%). The study therefore concludes that health communication is crucial to prostate cancer preventive and management approach. The study therefore recommended the need to establish a nationwide prostate cancer communication foundation to improve compliance and practice of prostate cancer messages.

Keywords: Health, communication, prostate cancer, combating

Introduction

The importance of health communication in providing effective healthcare system that can cater for the overall positive well-being of the people cannot be undermined. Poor communication has the potential to affect both infectious and non-infectious diseases. As a result, communication is no longer an issue that can be relegated to the background, but rather an integral part of patient care.

This development has propelled notable scholars as Simeon (2021) who posits that health communication is crucial in the development, gathering and sharing of health data which can be effectively used to manage or address all forms of health-related challenges ravaging humanity of which prostate cancer is one. Simeon (2021) further asserted that health communication constitutes a basic human capacity that allows individuals, groups and organizations to actively respond to a variety of health challenges.

Prostate cancer is a serious health challenge to men generally, as they approach 45 years to 65 years (Lensley, 2020). It is as a result of the sensitive and worrisome nature of this disease, that caused many scholars like Patnou, (2022) to emphasize the importance of employing the use of health communication for prostate cancer handling beyond biological and mechanical solutions.

The real essence of health communication is to reduce and remove risk factors associated with unhealthy lifestyle choices engaged by men within the aforementioned age bracket. Following the assertion of the National Cancer Institute (1989) cited in Agbaruo (2020), communication is important in all aspects of human health, encompassing personal and public health. From the perspective of the National Cancer Institute, people are gradually becoming increasingly interested in the use of health communication as a measure to manage any form of health crises as well as using the knowledge of health communication to nip the contraction of diseases in the bud.

According to Oslo (2021), health communication is more of a preventive strategy to disease contraction than a curative approach. It is obvious that the preponderance of health issues and problems offer enough rationale for health communication to be taken seriously particularly on the area of prostate cancer which has tended to challenge the resources, skills, ingenuity of government and health professionals including researchers (Wakeson, 2022).

Recent statistics from the ministry of health, Imo state, has revealed that there is a rising incidence of prostate cancer among men in Imo state. This situation has become so worrisome as to case death in 1 out of 20 reported cases of prostate cancer in Imo state. (IMSHM, 2021). It is for this reason that it became exceedingly necessary to undertake a study to find out how this health challenge can be overcome

Statement of the Problem

Prostate cancer is often identified as a silent killer because carriers are often unaware of their condition. Letbell (2020) opines that some men can be infected for up to ten years without realizing it. Prostate cancer is one of the top ten killer diseases in the world, with a high mortality rate from both acute non-infectious and chronic illnesses.

Prostate cancer according to World Health Organization affects around one out of every nine men at some point in their lives. With 1.28 million cases and a 26.6 percent incidence rate. It is on record that prostate cancer has become a global health concern due to escalating morbidity and mortality rates in men (Onoja, 2021). Lingwada, (2019) notes that about 100,000 Nigerians are diagnosed with cancer each year.

Currently, a research conducted by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), Prostate cancer is the most common and lethal cancer in Nigerian men, accounting for 32.8 cases and 16.3 deaths per 100,000 men. The problem associated to prostate cancer is so crucial that it becomes imperative to employ the use of health communication approach to reduce the rising incidence of the silent killer disease.

The need for health communication becomes crucial as it employs the use of different media platforms to inform, educate and create awareness while also sensitizing the people through the various media of communication as radio, television, social media, newspapers, etc. of the various health challenges facing humanity and its risk reduction and management approaches.

Objective of the Study

The specific objectives of this study were to:

- 1) Determine the sources of information on prostate cancer from the study respondents.
- 2) Ascertain the knowledge level of respondents on prostate cancer.
- 3) Find out the role of health communication in the management of prostate cancer.
- 4) Determine the attitude of the study respondents towards prostate cancer.
- 5) Find out the extent of practice of prostate cancer prevention among the study respondents.

Literature Review

Concept of Health Communication

The Center for Disease and Control (CDC) defines health communication as the study and use of communication strategies to inform and influence individuals and community decisions that enhance health (CDC, 2011). This explains the fact that health communication is process driven. Nutbeam, (2022) describes health communication as an important technique for tackling public health, challenges. Increasing

the population's health literacy so that they can understand and use information about health issues, as well as having a significant impact on health behaviour remains the underlying tone about health communication.

It has been demonstrated that delivering vital health messages have an impacting effect on people's knowledge, attitude and belief regarding health behavioural choices (Nnorom, 2019). Non-viral diseases such as cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and chronic respiratory disorders have been attested to be influenced by communication.

Compliance to health communication information is crucial in the eradication of prostate cancer (PC). This is essential because it revolves around establishing rightful approaches, identifying all health-related concerns and expanding appropriate knowledge (Olaide, 2021). Prostate cancer has global presence and cannot be treated with kid gloves. The hallmark of good health communication is to present the message of any health issue in a clear colourful prose that takes the receiver of the message (target audience) inside a world whose inhabitants – doctors, scientists, health workers, care givers speak a secret language (Rich, 2021).

Rich further stated that effective health communication message must be clear and have a human touch. The message to be communicated on prostate cancer must be understandable to the targeted audience and stripped of jargon so that the targeted audience can make meaning of the message for compliance to be achievable within a programmed time.

Role of Health Communication in Managing Prostate Cancer

With health communication everyone in the society can be winners because of the immense benefits it has to all members of the society, both individuals and communities. Such roles include but not limited to the understated.

- Health communication creates awareness and expand knowledge about prostate cancer
- Through the effort of health communication, it can cause people to change negative health related behavior. This is because behavior plays an important role in people's health (for example, smoking, poor diet, lack of exercise and sexual risk – taking can cause a large number of diseases).
- Through health communication people can adopt lifestyles and behaviours that promote health while also adopting new preventive and treatment measures.
- It can also influence perceptions, beliefs and attitudes that may change social norms, prompt action, demonstrate or illustrate health skills.
- Health communication can help to refute myths and misconceptions and strengthen organization relationships.
- Importantly, health communication promotes risk reduction practice towards lifestyles that can expose one to the danger of contracting diseases.

No one media or channel can be effectively used to realize a health communication campaign/programme. This is because people have different choices of media appeal. This implies that for proper health communication to be realized, the different media of communication such as television, radio newspaper, magazine, internet, outdoor media must come into play (Ogunji, 2021).

Further, the media choice will also include both interpersonal communication, caregivers, health workers, community health workers, health advocates relations, friends etc. All these constitute the communication chain that disseminate information in one form or the other on prostate cancer.

The understanding is that medical professionals or caregivers and all those involved in communication exchange on prostate cancer must first study targeted audience demography and

psychography so as to effectively convey the message of prostate cancer through a communication channel that appeals to them (Uwa, 2021).

What is Prostate Cancer?

Prostate cancer can either be classified as androgen sensitive or androgen insensitive which is an indicator of testosterone stimulation (Andrian, 2021). This is an indication that varieties of diseases can cause an expansion of the prostate gland above its natural size. The effect being that the enlargement will cause a blockade of the urinary track causing a difficulty of urine passage.

The primary cause of prostate cancer is an enlargement of the prostate in the prostate gland. Every male has a prostate. Importantly, there exist reasons for the enlargement of the prostate in every male adult who is presently between the age bracket of 45 to 65. The nature of the treatment to a prostate cancer patient will depend on nature of the tumour. When prostate cancer is noticed at an earlier stage, it is easily managed, than when the tumour expands to as much as 14%.

The treatment options available for prostate cancer are active surveillance, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, hormonal therapy, surgery and cryotherapy. Some of the effects of a patient suffering prostate cancer includes: fatigue, hair loss, peripheral neuropathy, erectile in continence and dysfunction, metastasis and developing resistance to the initial treatment.

Though available treatment options are expensive and pose severe side effects, but early detection of the disease can be easily managed and less expensive to carter for. At this stage, appropriate recommended drug and regular water intake on daily basis can help sustain the situation (Neddy, 2021).

Causes of Prostate Cancer

Some of the causes of prostate cancer according to Slack (2021) can be traced primarily to genetic inheritance lifestyle, urinary tract infections. Untreated urinary infections, obesity etc. the research conducted by Blinks and Gerry, (2021) on causes of Prostate cancer among men revealed close family lineage is the primary risk factor for prostate cancer.

Men with close relatives diagnosed with prostate cancer are at a 50% risk of developing cancer as compared with men with no family history of prostate cancer. Epidemiologic studies have shown that prostate cancer risk may be a result of heritable factors.

Lifestyle is another strong factor that resonates prostate cancer in men. This may include constant smoking, excessive drinking of alcohol, uncontrolled sexual risk and sometimes the type of food or drug we take in that are not recommended. According to Ogunjobi (2021) our lifestyle impacts significantly on our health status. Most of the diseases we contract in one form or the other are the result of the lifestyle or behavior we adapt to.

Theoretical Framework

This research hinges mainly on the Health Belief Model (HBM) developed in the 1950s by Geoffrey Hochbaum. It is one of the models of behavior change typically used for studying and promoting the uptake of health services (Becker, 2021). This model guide and inform health communication and promotion programmes with regards to individual responses and utilization of health services (Obregon, 2019). The health belief model (HBM) is a psychological model that attempts to explain and predict health behaviours by focusing on the attitudes and beliefs of individuals.

The theory helps to assess the health behavior of individuals through examination of perceptions and attitudes someone may have towards diseases and negative outcome of certain actions (Bridght, 2020).

The theory further helps to explain why sometimes many people despite the communicated benefits of a health programme would not participate and exhibit compliance to expose health practice for their own positive will being.

The import of the HBM to this study is unique. This is because HBM posits that health communication messages on prostate cancer will achieve optional behavior change if they successfully target perceived barriers and threat. The messages of health communication on prostate cancer touches on those sensitive areas which the target audience (men) need to be knowledgeable about so as to conform to positive practice against Prostate cancer. This way, the disease (PC) can be prevented since an expanded knowledge on the risk reduction factors have been exposed through various communication channels.

Methodology

A quantitative survey method was employed to assess the role of health communication in tackling prostate cancer in Imo State. The justification of the use of survey method was based on its ability to generate current opinion on the subject under investigation and on a wide range of community of males in Imo State. The study included men from all walks of life within the states urban, semi-urban and rural areas. The entire population were given equal opportunities of being selected.

This work studied the men population of the 9 L.G.As in Owerri zone which comprises, Owerri North, Owerri West, Owerri Municipal, Ngor Okpala, Mbaitoli, Ikeduru, Aboh Mbaize Ezinihite and Ahiazu. Our choice of the men as the focus population was informed by the fact that prostate cancer is a health challenge associated with men. The total number of men (between the ages of 45 – 65 who are prone to prostate cancer) in Owerri zone according to the National population commission protection for 2023 is 274,520. The breakdown was as follows;

Table 1: Population of men in the 9 LGAs in Owerri zone

S/N	STATE	L.G.A	POPULATION FIGURE
1.	Imo state	Owerri North	30,628
2.		Owerri West	21,365
3.		Owerri Municipal	36,100
4.		Ikeduru	31,800
5.		Mbaitoli	23,250
6.		Ngor Okpalla	42,660
7.		Ahiazu	26,620
8.		Ezinihitte	37,290
9.		Aboh Mbaize	34,810
	Total	9	34,810

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Sample Size

The sample size for the study was 340. This was empirically determined using sample size prescribed by Meyer (1973).

Table 2: Population and Sample Size as Determined by Meyer

S/N	POPULATION SIZE	SAMPLE SIZE
1.	Infinity	384
2.	500,000 – 700,000	384
3.	400,000 – 400-600	375
4.	300,000 – 390,000	350
5.	200,000 – 290,000	340
6.	100,000 – 190,000	300
7.	1000 – 99,000	250

Drawing from the calculations of Meyer 1973 as shown in table 2 above, the suggestion is that a sample of 340 could do for a population size of 274,520.

The multistage sampling technique was used to select 340 men from across the 9 LGAs in Owerri zone. The instrument for data collection for the study was the questionnaire. The administration of the questionnaire was carried out in face-to-face basis.

Data generated from the survey study was made up of 340 male adults from Owerri zone of Imo State. The data generated was analyzed using simple percentage and frequency distribution presented in table format.

Table 3: Summary of Study participant Bio – data

Age of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 29	36	10.6
30 – 39	28	8.2
40 – 49	108	31.8
50 – above	168	49.4
Total	340	100.0
Education		
Diploma/NCE	116	34.1
B.Sc	148	43.5
MA & above	76	22.4
Total	340	100.0
Occupation		

Business	76	22.4
Civil service	169	49.7
Unemployed	41	12.1
Student	54	15.8
Total	340	100.0
Marital Status		
Married	208	61.2
Single	126	37.1
Others	6	1.7
Total	340	100.0

Data revealed majority of the respondents fall within the age bracket of 40 – 49(31.8%). Further majority of the respondents are educated and are more engaged in civil service. 61.2% are married.

Table 4: Respondents' Information Sources

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Television	31	9.2
Radio	20	5.9
Newspaper	26	7.5
Magazine	15	4.4
Internet	151	44.4
Health care givers	44	13
Friends/Relations	53	15.6
Total	340	100.0

Information revealed that information on prostate cancer was mainly received through the internet.

Table 5: Respondents knowledge level of Prostate cancer

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	32	9.4
High	242	71.2
Average	49	14.4
Very low	4	1.2
Low	13	3.8
Total	340	100.0

Data showed that the study respondents have high knowledge about prostate cancer.

Table 6: Role of HC on the Management of Prostate Cancer

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Awareness creation	44	12.9
Knowledge development	188	55.3
Positive attitude toward PC	92	27.1
Others	16	4.7
Total	340	100.0

The implication of the above table suggests that HC helps in knowledge on prostate cancer.

Table 7; Respondents' attitude towards Prostate cancer

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	292	85.9
Negative	28	8.2
Neutral	20	5.9
Total	340	100.0

The above table suggests that the study respondents display positive attitude towards prostate cancer.

Table 8: Respondents extent of Practice of PC Prevention

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Regularly	61	13.9
Often	266	78.2
Can't say	13	7.9
Total	340	100.0

Information contained in the above table showed that respondents practice PC prevention is done occasionally indicating that the practice is poor.

Discussion of Findings

The study of health communication is crucial in tackling prostate cancer which has been a burdensome disease to the male folk. Health communication, according to Bogun (2019) facilitates a better understanding of how the disease operates, the management and preventative approach. The knowledge of prostate cancer helps men to engage in lifestyles that will not expose them to the risk of prostate cancer development.

Knowledge acquisition on prostate cancer is the function of the varieties of sources of information available to the individual. Furtherance to this, Ojomolafe (2020) posits that the media of information dissemination plays a strong role in appealing to the individual on a particular subject showcased.

For instance, the internet was revealed to be an important component of global health communication (Asiodu, 2020). This means that the effective in delivering health messages. Since its information dissemination strategy can be easily accessed by all and it is not captive in nature. The internet essentially uses social media network sites such as Facebook, Instagram, twitter, Whatsapp and so many others to reach out to its numerous online users scattered all over the place.

Aside from the internet, other communication media such radio, television, newspapers, magazines, billboards have also been used to send out messages bothering on prostate cancer. The effect of these messages particular is to evoke behavior change towards the practice of PC preventative approaches for the good and positive health well-being of the men generally (Derek, 2021). It is also important to say, that both the traditional media, mainstream media and the internet must coverage for effective health communication to be realize at whatever level. According to Yenusi (2021), health communication can only realize its aim when there is a complete synergy in media relations.

The knowledge level of respondents towards prostate cancer was found to be very high at 71.2(80.6%). This observation can be traced to the effectiveness of the wide range of sources through which information on prostate cancer is disseminated. This finding is corroborated by Willie (2018), who asserted one of the greatest benefits of media convergence is its ability to expand knowledge on the subject being addressed. This means that health messages reach out faster to the target audiences through a mixture of media types emphasizing on a particular issue.

Health communication is increasingly becoming a crucial factor in tackling and managing all forms of health-related diseases Health Communication is more preventative than curative. It builds behavioural change through awareness creation, sensitization and knowledge development. This can be achieved through a planned informative process. Information changes attitude towards health practice (Ukonu, 2018).

With health communication, it is possible to have a clearer nature of the symptom, cause, treatment, preventative and effect of a particular health challenge. This knowledge can reach the audience through the

various media options available to us. Human attitude towards a particular health challenge is the function of the efficacy of health communication approach being deployed to reach out to the concerned audience.

Table 5 revealed that a larger number of the study respondents have positive attitude 292(85.9%) towards prostate cancer. Indeed, attitude and perception are shaped by knowledge. And knowledge itself is shaped by the accessibility of varieties of information sources which acts as a window through which we can develop insights about a particular health challenge (Onoja, 2018). Developing positive attitude also implies that the health communication strategy employed was effective and persuasive. The message on prostate cancer was delivered in a manner that can be easily understood by the audience

The finding in table 6 also revealed that respondents practice of health communication messages on prostate cancer is done occasionally. The idea is that the practice of prostate preventative approaches by respondents was poor.

This result evokes surprise, considering the varieties of media options available to respondents. Again, Owo (2021) makes a difference between exposure and content utilization. It is one thing to be aware of something, have knowledge about, and it is also another to use the content in practical terms. This may have accounted for the poor practice of prostate cancer preventative messages delivered by the various media of information dissemination.

Essentially, the health belief model comes to play as it effectively utilizes communication principles to sensitize and draw awareness of the preventative approaches and management of prostate cancer, for the purpose of creating safety and good health being of men who are prone to prostate cancer.

Conclusion

The study concludes that for best practice on preventive and management of prostate cancer, health communication should be highly emphasized. Further, since majority of the study respondents identified with internet as a major source of information on prostate cancer, it is therefore valid to say that internet usage should be given serious attention to enhance its use for health promotion.

Since it has been revealed that health communication is unique in the treatment of diseases, the study concludes that health professionals should be trained in the act of effective communication principles employing the use of the different media types for effective communication to take place.

This study has the following implications. First, it will help to determine the extent to which medical personnels, health ministry, healthcare givers use health communication approaches to provide informed knowledge on prostate cancer to the targeted audience.

The study underscores the importance of health communication as an indispensable tool for effective management of prostate cancer among men. The study will be of immense benefit to Nigerian Medical practitioners and health caregivers. In other words, it will help these experts to improve their knowledge and skills in the area of utilizing health communication to address varieties of health challenges and particularly prostate cancer handling.

Recommendation

The study suggests that there should

1. be a convergence of the entire media of communication so as to make the messages of health communication impactful on the audience.
2. The contents of the health communication messages should be more persuasive and clearer to enhance knowledge expansion.
3. Message reinforcement is necessary to encourage attitude change and enhance practice of message

4. There is the need to create a national foundation for prostate cancer management for risk factor prevention on prostate cancer.

References

- Beeker, A. (2021): theories of health Communication, New Delhi PTV 006413. Inc.
- Bogun, C. (2019): Programme on immunization (NPI). *A Handbook on basic Guide for Routine Immunization Service providers*. Abuja Akinsowale books.
- Bright U. (2020): New Technologies in health Communication. Koks and Kilmock Bookshops.
- Derek, I. (2021): Prostate cancer. No Thank You. *Journal of International Health Communication*. (3) pp. 178 – 132.
- Lensley, W. (2020): Inflammation as a driver of prostate cancer metastasis and therapeutic resistance cancers, 3; 70 – 93
- Letbell, S. (2020): Principles of health communication. *In the New World Order*. San Francisco. (A: Jossey – Bass)
- Lingwada, K. (2019): Audience Perceptions of health communication messages. The Uninga Customary belief. *Journal of social science studies*, 3(6), 44 – 61.
- National cancer Institute (NCI 1989)
- Neddy, C. (2021): Introduction to New Media usage of Health Management. Illinois: Edworthshire.
- Nnorom, A. (2019): Introduction to Public Health Management. Owerri: Ossy bookshops.
- Nutbeam, U. (2020): New Media and health Communication principles. *Journal of Biology and Health Care* vol 2 No 7 pp 88 – 102.
- Ogunji, O. (2021): preventive Approaches in Prostate cancer. Lagos: OTI Bookshops.
- Ojomolafe, B. (2020): *Health Communication for Health, People and Nation*. Abeokuta African Resource Communication.
- Olaide, C. (2021): Managing Prostate cancer. An introductory perspective. Lagos Olaitan bookshops.
- Onoja, B.S (2018): globalization and Anti Prostate Cancer campaign. *Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*. Maiduguri.
- Onoja, S.B (2021): Health communications patterns and strategies: Markurdi: bon Publishers.
- Oslo, S.O (2021): problems associated in assessing health communication. *An Overview of urban/Semi urban habituating*. Lagos: Timisola Bookshop
- Owo, J.A (2021). Health Communication plans and strategies. *An overview in Modern medicine*. Lagos: Ibronke Bookshops
- Rich, L. (2021). Our Health; Our life. *Journal of biological and healthcare Studies*. 3 (2) pp 60 – 76.
- Simeon, A. (2021): global Patterns in Health Communication Strategies for Managing Prostate cancer. *European Eurology*. Vol 8 pp 65 – 73.
- Ukonu, M.C (2018): *HIV AIDS Awareness and knowledge Development Among Youths in Imo State* Owerri: Piscian books
- Uwa, S. (2021): Managing the silent killer. An overview of prostate cancer. Ebenezer Bookshops.
- Wakeson, B. (2021): Knowledge and Treatment pattern of prostate cancer in men. McGraw-Hill

Willie, S.L (2018): An Interview in bulletin of the World health Organization, 84 No 8 Geneva

Yenusi, O. (2021), Health Communication. *An Overview of selected theories and models*. Ibadan University Press