

Short Communication

Malaria and the media: advocating a healthy policy and practice

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The campaign against malaria is approaching a critical time. Now that plans are in place and political support has been secured, we need to ensure that unprecedented action follows. It is vital that advocacy work supports this stage of intensified action. Advocacy is winning the support of key constituencies in order to influence policies and spending, and bring about social change.

Advocacy through the media has been identified by the Centre for Enhancement of Effective Malaria Interventions (CEEMI) as one of the most effective ways of delivering information to the targeted audience. The media serves as a conduit of information in a two-way flow between the Ministry of Health or Government and the targeted community. As such, media can be an important tool for bringing about desired behavioural change in the community.

At the end of October 2002, the CEEMI, in collaboration with the National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP); Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM); the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA); Commonwealth Press Union (CPU); National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR) and other local partners, especially media organs, organized a one-week workshop for journalists from the print and electronic media.

Participants of the workshop were drawn from different media organs in Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda. The main objective of the workshop was to raise the quality of reporting and programming in order to provide audiences with accurate, relevant, interesting, entertaining and educational information that will assist the targeted audience to make healthier choices with respect to malaria control. The workshop, which was considered to be a success had three main features as follows:-

- (i) Survey to assess knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) of journalists.
- (ii) Meeting between the Minister for health and owners/chief executive officers (CEO) of media organs.

(iii) Workshop for journalists.

Preliminary results from KAP studies show that, generally, higher education was associated with better knowledge on malaria issues. Only a small percentage (4%) of the interviewees felt that malaria was not a threat to human life.

A significantly higher percentage of females appreciated the protective effect of ITNs compared with their counterpart male journalists. It was also apparent that, a significantly higher percentage of female journalists was more likely to conduct a proper investigation related to a disease outbreak than male journalists.

A meeting between the Minister for Health and owners/CEOs of media organs was organized with the aim of soliciting the latter's support for malaria prevention and control initiatives through dissemination of information to the communities they serve. The Honourable Minister reiterated the need for the media and the MoH to work together against the malaria scourge.

The workshop on malaria and the media, which started off as a national event progressed into an inter country programme drawing participants from Kenya (6), Malawi (2), Tanzania (20) and Uganda (6). In addition to the knowledge and skills in malaria given to the journalists, they were also facilitated and trained in better practices in relation to their work.

An email discussion group was set up to enable them to network, and to link up with experts in malaria through CEEMI and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine.

At a later date, three of the participants were awarded fellowships to enable them to attend the Multilateral Initiative on Malaria (MIM) Conference in Arusha, Tanzania. Through process evaluation it was apparent that the participants benefited a lot. The impact of the training will be presented in more details after a comprehensive evaluation survey has been conducted in the near future.