

*The Creation of
Public Health Service Announcements
by Adult Education Students
in Northeastern Tennessee*

Karen Honess and Barbara King

East Tennessee State University and
Unicoi County Adult Education Program

RURAL APPALACHIAN CANCER DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM

ABSTRACT

Findings from the Appalachian Regional Commission identified regional health disparities, particularly prominent among young adults (premature mortality). Characteristics of this group are often viewed as not dissimilar to the remainder of the Appalachian population, particularly regarding economic and educational backgrounds. To discover the attitudes of and beliefs of a subset of this group, a series of six classroom presentations about the ARC premature mortality findings were provided for adult education classrooms in the region. A summary of impressions suggested that radio was a common channel to reach that age group with cancer prevention messages. One adult education group integrated the development of cancer prevention messages into its classroom assignment. Two public service announcements were developed.

This material is a copy of a program report to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention intended for the purposes of dissemination of results. This report has not been peer reviewed for the purposes of publication. This Program was supported in whole by grant # H57-CCH420134.

Background and Purpose

Northeastern Tennessee, experience elevated rates of many types of cancer mortality. Awareness of cancer in individual communities throughout the mountains is high, but awareness of regional rates of cancer incidence and mortality is not. The concept of regional place-based health disparities has been documented elsewhere in the work of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)ⁱ and the Rural Appalachian Cancer Demonstration Program (RACDP).

The ARC study found Appalachia as a population experiences higher premature, or before age 65, mortality rates when compared with national mortality rates. Reaching this population with preventive messages has been seen as a continuous challenge among health promotion and education professionals and programs. Several RACDP studies have found that use of preventive services is related to the busyness of life situations, lack of knowledge about cancer and lack of direct guidance from health professionals. In many of its community-based participatory studies, RACDP found great personal awareness and concern among members' pre-age 65 residents, but their ability of willingness to act was compromised.

In one RACDP study, nine focus groups were held with existing social groups in rural community settings in East Tennessee, Southwest Virginia and Eastern Kentuckyⁱⁱ to determine knowledge and attitudes about cancer as well as the best ways to communicate proactive, healthful messages to local residents, Findings revealed a number of reasons that participants were reluctant to engage in preventative health care including cancer screenings. Members stated that the very thought of cancer generated feelings of denial, depression and fear and that, in their personal experience, cancer was typically fatal and that cancer treatment may be unsafe and was ultimately ineffective. The focus groups indicated the relative importance of the sources of messages about cancer, noting the role of media as highly valued. ⁱⁱⁱ Clues to

developing effective media communication with the pre-age 65 group were uncovered as part of presentations of RACDP premature mortality findings to six adult education classes in East Tennessee. Participants noted that they listen to radio both at home and while driving and suggested that health related public service announcements (PSAs) may be an effective way to reach area residents. Two important clues were provided. First, the selection of SENDERS of messages is pivotal; local/regional voices were seen as preferred to generic national PSAs. Second, the content of MESSAGES needs to be carefully scripted; adult education students expressed concern about language and complexity that influence the listener's ability to understand content.

With this in mind, one local adult education class was recruited to conceptualize, write and record public service announcements concerning health promotion behaviors to air on the local radio station. To have maximum effect, the PSAs were to involve local message development by local people in their own words and voices.

When working with small, rural Appalachian communities, trust is the foundation from which all further work flows. We established student trust by working with a well-known and trusted community member, a former adult education teacher, who secured support from one East Tennessee school system needed to ensure project success. This former teacher made initial contacts with school administrators, students, and the local radio station owners. The RACDP staff and former teacher introduced the issue of premature mortality and cancer rates to the adult education class and challenged their participation in the development of the public service announcements. To guarantee that the PSAs would receive air time, the former teacher met with the local commercial radio station management including the radio disc jockeys to explain the purpose, need for and content of the MESSAGES.

We worked with all students attending day classes at the Unicoi County Adult Education Program in Erwin, Tennessee. The initial group consisted of four female students, age ranging from 17 to 40. Two additional students joined the class near the end of the process, a male and female both 21 years old. All student meetings, including the recording sessions conducted by the local public radio station, were held at the Unicoi County continuing education classrooms.

Public Service Announcement Development

At our first meeting, we spent time getting to know each other and talking to the students about the project. And to better inform the students and to show the need for health promotion through the local media, we presented and discussed the data showing area cancer disparities and premature mortality rates. The students were surprised by this information as they were not aware of this regional data.

The second session focused on health related television and radio messages. Students identified types of messages they felt had the most impact and discussed the distinguishing characteristics of those messages. For example, the students were surprised by an anti-smoking commercial that showed that the chemicals in cigarettes were capable of stripping the hair off of one's skin. They were also impressed by the young age of the women portrayed in the HPV vaccine advertisements showing that quite young women could contract cervical cancer from this virus. Additionally, we asked the students to consider their community and identify the most important health care related issues in their County. The students stated that many people were reluctant to visit a doctor, particularly for preventative care including cancer screenings and tests. The prevailing local attitude identified by the students was that if a resident had a health screening with a negative result, that resident would be reluctant to seek follow up treatment. It is thought that people feel that "no news is good news" and they are therefore unlikely to participate in cancer screenings. These findings are similar to others identified by RACDP studies.

At the request and concurrence of the adult education teacher, the PSA development was incorporated into the existing adult education curriculum and specific student classroom assignments. For example, students wrote essays addressing health behavioral issues that were important and locally relevant. As a group learning exercise, the essays were reviewed to determine which messages would be appropriate for our goal of promoting cancer prevention and awareness. The students decided that the

primary message for the broadcast should be residents' need to get regular physical check-ups and follow through with any recommended actions. Also, the students felt that it was important to let listeners know that they had the right to take charge of their own health care by being proactive and asking questions. The theme "Take the time to take charge of your health" emerged from the student essays and our discussions. Several important decisions were made by the students. First, the focus of the PSA MESSAGE should be to encourage residents to get an annual check-up and to follow through with any recommendations. Second, the goal of producing two announcements was set, one being about annual check-ups and the other about getting test results. Third, using a brainstorming approach, students discussed who they themselves would listen to and who they thought would listen to the PSAs. The students felt that most older people would listen to the PSAs but that it was necessary to get the attention of younger listeners. They also agreed to start the announcement with a common, modern sound, the ringing of a cell phone. In discussing how people communicate these days, the students asserted and all agreed that they do most of their talking on the phone (including cell phones). So the students came up with the idea of two friends talking on the phone about their experiences with their annual check-up. The cell phone rings, someone answers, the conversation begins and you can't help but listen!

Scripts for two sessions were prepared by students and students began rehearsals. Sessions were audiotaped and the results listened to critically. Modifications to the script were made and the results were retaped to determine the best approach with the most powerful impact.

One week prior to the professional taping of the announcements, the RACDP staff and former adult education teacher met with a separate adult education evening class to present and discuss the regional data showing area cancer disparities and premature mortality rates and to solicit feedback about the proposed PSAs. Student feedback from this session was extremely valuable and influenced the final format of the two messages. In fact, the evening students did not hear that the original second message was about getting test results. Instead, they felt it was again about getting a check-up. They stated that the message was not clear and did not get to the point soon

enough. Changes were made and the group met a final time to rehearse the shortened and clarified messages.

The local public radio affiliate, WETS FM (operated by East Tennessee State University) assisted by attending the adult education class in Unicoi County to tape the students performing the scripted announcements. The students concluded that it was important for women and men of all ages to pay attention to the MESSAGE so they wanted both genders and a range of ages represented. Students also felt that the voice for the main theme of the PSAs should be authoritative but kind, like a grandmothers' voice encouraging listeners to take care of their health. To expand the reach and spectrum of the MESSAGEs, the voices of two young women, a young man and the former teacher were used. The station manager mixed the voices and added background sounds at the radio station.

The entire message development and taping process was completed in 23 days including 8 meetings with the class.

Findings and Summary

- The adult education students and staff were very interested in and cooperative about the intent and objectives of this project.
- The adult education students understood the meaning and effects of premature mortality as an issue in their local community.
- The processes leading to the development of the PSAs were easily incorporated into existing school curriculum.
- The knowledge and expertise of the adult education students served as an advantage in framing the format and content of the message development and delivery.

References

Halverson J.A, Ma L., and Harner E.J. (2004). An analysis of disparities in health status and access to health care in the Appalachian region. Washington DC: Appalachian Regional Commission.

Shell, Renee, EdD, RNCS, FNP et al; “Knowledge, Perceptions, and Attitudes about Cancer among Diverse Rural Appalachian Communities.” Rural Appalachian Cancer Demonstration Program 2001- 2006, Summary Report of Findings, 2006.

Geary, Deborah, MS and Behringer, Bruce, MPH; “Community Focus Groups: Report to Participating Communities.” Rural Appalachian Cancer Demonstration Program 2001-2006, Summary Report of Findings, 2006.

Take Time to Take Charge of Your Health Public Service Announcement 1

Phone ringing in the background...

Amy: Hello? ... Hey, we still meeting for lunch?

Lorena: I'm on my way now!

Sound of dishes/silverware rattling...

Amy: So, How've you been?

Lorena: Busy! Today I got the test results of my yearly checkup from my doctor.

Amy: Oh, did you go because you were worried about something?

Lorena: No, I feel fine. The test results can show something is wrong before you even feel bad, so I go every year....Have you been for your check-up?

Amy: No, I am way to busy! I don't know where you found the time!

Lorena: I just decided to make the time. You need to call your doctor.

Barbara: If it's time for your check-up, please call your doctor today. Take the time to take charge of your health.

This healthy message is brought to you by adult education students in Northeastern Tennessee.

Take Time to Take Charge of Your Health PSA Message 2

Phone ringing in the background...

Lorena: Hey, what's the news?

Amy: I am so relieved, everything is fine.

Lorena: That's great! I was worried when the doctor wanted a second test.

Amy: Yeah, me too. It was upsetting, but it's good that I went for a check-up. Now, I know I'm okay.

Lorena: I'm glad you asked the doctor all those questions, now we know more about the warning signs and why they needed a second test.

Amy: Yeah, now I know what to look for and who to call. I'm more in charge of staying healthy.

Lorena: (with smiling voice) I agree! Now we know how to stay healthier!

Amy: Right! Now that I took time to take care of my health, I'll let everyone know that they ought to as well!

Barbara: If it's time for your check-up, please call your doctor today. Take the time to take charge of your health.

This healthy message is brought to you by adult education students in Northeastern Tennessee.

ⁱ Halverson J.A, Ma L., and Harner E.J. (2004). An analysis of disparities in health status and access to health care in the Appalachian region. Washington DC: Appalachian Regional Commission.

ⁱⁱ Shell, Renee, EdD, RNCS, FNP et al; "Knowledge, Perceptions, and Attitudes about Cancer among Rural Appalachian Communities." Rural Appalachian Cancer Demonstration Program 2001-2006, Summary Report of Findings, 2006.

ⁱⁱⁱ Geary, Deborah, MS and Behringer, Bruce, MPH; "Community Focus Groups: Report to Participating Communities." Rural Appalachian Cancer Demonstration Program 2001-2006, Summary Report of Findings, 2006.