



SCRIPTDOCTOR: MEDICINE IN THE MEDIA

Dateline Nigeria (Part 2):

How the BBC World Service Trust Is Using the Power of Media to Provide Life-Saving Information Across Regional, Ethnic, & Class Divides

By Andrew Holtz, MPH

As I flipped through TV channels in my Abuja, Nigeria hotel room one evening—which, by the way, offered a feast of soccer; I once counted six games airing simultaneously—I landed on a soap opera of dazzling production quality. It appeared to be set in Nigeria, but the polished look contrasted sharply with the usual fare on the local stations. As I enjoyed the show, I didn't realize that I already had an appointment with its creators.

I was there in Nigeria as one of three US reporters brought in for a series of workshops put on by the US Embassy and a Nigerian media company. During three-day programs in Lagos and again in the capital, Abuja, we worked with about 150 Nigerian reporters, students, and teachers.

A red sunrise illuminates the national mosque in Abuja. A young woman emerges from the passenger seat of a black BMW. She tiptoes into her well-appointed home, quickly changing before her mother wakes up. In far less comfortable surroundings, a father, mother and their children rouse from their beds in the one room they all share. For another poor family, the day begins with tragedy. A girl takes breakfast to her mother, but mother is dead.

The stories draw you in. The casual viewer would never realize that this



Andrew Holtz talking to Christine K, Head of the BBC World Service Trust's HIV/AIDS Project Nigeria

drama is actually the alluring distant cousin of those lame health-class films about dating that were once inflicted on captive adolescents. A few days after stumbling on the primetime soap called *Wetin Dey*—which means “What’s Up?”—I sat down with Christine K, head of the HIV/AIDS Project Nigeria for the BBC World Service Trust.

No Gloom-and-Doom Approach

“Our campaign is a reaction to all the doom-and-gloom campaigning that HIV started with everywhere in the world,” she said. “I’m sure it wasn’t so different in the States. Definitely in Europe, it was always, ‘What you see

today is only the tip of the iceberg. It could be the end of your life; in fact, it will be the end of your life.”

That approach just gets tuned out by Nigerians overwhelmed by daily struggles, she said.

“Since they have a lot of problems, without HIV, I think the tendency is to say, ‘Please, can you just leave me alone for now? I’ve got no money. I’ve got no job. I’ve got a lot of people who depend on me. Why do you now want me to engage with HIV?’ So we are still trying to overcome the after-effects of earlier campaigns. You’ve got to go in there with a tone that engages them, with a realistic approach.”

Christine K (yes, her last name is

Andrew Holtz, MPH, is a former CNN Medical Correspondent and the author of “The Medical Science of House, M.D.”

Send questions to him about how the media treat medical topics or suggestions for future columns to OT@lwnny.com

just K) said the BBC World Service Trust used to do workshops for journalists, but eventually concluded that the real action is in entertainment and other programming, not news. In addition to *Wetin Dey*, they produce news and variety radio shows and short video testimonials by people living with HIV.

Flava is the title of a radio news and talk show for—and by—youth. Producer Aro Leonard said the presenters are tuned into the latest trends and slang—which means he’s always trying to keep up.

“For English now, instead of coming out to say ‘sex,’ on one of the editions, one of the guests brought in a new word: ‘Room 2.,” Leonard said. Room 1 is just talking. So for those of us who grew up with American baseball slang, it seems that Nigerian youth are skipping right past a few bases. Leonard said slang helps them communicate with young people, while not riling older listeners.

Finding Best Mix of Language

But language is also a challenge, he

Macrophages

continued from page 43

that in the chemotherapy arm that did not get rituximab, they could see the effect of benign macrophages. Cases with more macrophages had a worse outcome, but the effect largely went away in the treatment arm that received rituximab plus chemotherapy.”

Dr. Gascoyne characterized M1 macrophages as healers, while M2 macrophages cultivate a local environment favoring the tumor, not the host. The presence of tumor-associated macrophages in increased number therefore would be associated with a reduced survival: “Our hypothesis is that the tumors are producing something that brings macrophages into the

microenvironment and then perverts them from M1 to M2. That then creates a very comfortable trophic environment for the tumor.”

He said these new study data imply that the effect of rituximab must be mediated through the FC receptor, “and not the business end of the molecule that was made to find CD20.

“The macrophages themselves don’t express any CD20, so the impact [of rituximab] must be on some other part of the molecule or some off-target effect,” he said.

Dr. Gascoyne noted that in his 2005 report, the frequency of cases with a high tumor-associated macrophage content was only 10 or 12 percent—“It is not a big subset of cases,” he said.

But he saw potential for a new treatment paradigm coming from this

research.

“In cases before rituximab, high tumor-associated macrophage counts were associated with poor outcomes,” he said. “But once you give patients rituximab, it might even be that patients who have high macrophage counts do even better.”

‘Interesting but Not Necessarily Practical’

Asked for his opinion about the study, lymphoma expert James O. Armitage, MD, Professor of Internal Medicine in the Section of Hematology & Oncology at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, was somewhat less sanguine about the importance, saying that although the findings are very interesting and that tumor-associated macro-

phages might one day become a potential target for drug therapy, there is as yet no practical value. “You’d have to find a way to use this in a way that was to the patient’s advantage,” he said.

Dr. Armitage, a member of *OT*’s Editorial Board, did say that in gene arrays in follicular lymphoma, tumors that have a preponderance of T-cell antigens expressed seem to do better than those that are predominantly macrophage antigens or tumor suppressors.

“When those [tumor-associated macrophages] are highly expressed, it looks like patients don’t do as well as when the tumor expresses T-cell antigen,” he said. “So tumor-infiltrated macrophages might well be part of the immune modulation effect that keeps the body from killing the cancer.”

noted. It's not just keeping up with ever-changing slang, but finding the right mix of slang, proper English, and pidgin to communicate with listeners who range from college students to rural villagers who may have very little formal education.

"So while we pick up slang to sound up to date, we also make sure we talk about really simple basic facts," Christine K said. "And I think from the text messages that the radio program has received, we have a good idea how much medical and behavioral knowledge is really needed by young Nigerians."

On the day I visited, the creative team was picking apart a new set of TV testimonials by people living with HIV. Before this series of public service announcements hit the airwaves, Christine K said Nigerian viewers saw, over and over, the same handful of people who had revealed their HIV status. Then her colleagues found more than 50 people willing to broadcast the fact that they are living with HIV.

"That is an achievement for the 'spots' team, who managed to engage these people, at some risk to their own well-being, their family, the stigma they might suffer in the community, these were risks they were willing to take to get the message across," she said.

The initial run of 30-second spots is being followed now by a series of five-

minute mini-documentaries that introduce viewers to the families and lives of the people with HIV—the hope is that the focus on actual people that viewers can identify with rather than on just the biology of HIV can help break the circle of silence and stigma.

*Some time ago the
BBC World Trust
concluded that the real
action is in entertainment
and other programming
rather than news.*

Ms. K said that reports from focus groups are both encouraging and astonishing: "They look at a spot and then say, 'I really like the guy. He's so courageous to come out on TV. He's emotional. He's friendly. He looks like he could be one of my friends. But he shouldn't smile, because this is a serious issue and he should show remorse.'"

And some viewers said they thought a woman in one of the spots must be a prostitute, because of the way her hair looks. Christine K said such

mixed reactions show how hard it is for people to let go of their belief that HIV infection happens only to 'bad' people.

'Nollywood'

The BBC World Service Trust team has also engaged with the burgeoning local film industry—nicknamed "Nollywood." Nigerian filmmakers, working with tiny budgets, crank out feature-length videos in just a couple of weeks.

"But some of the quality is appalling," she said, explaining that BBC World Service Trust advisers try to nudge the filmmakers toward accurate depictions of HIV and AIDS and away from the kind of fear-mongering she saw in one video. She described scenes from a fictional rampage by people infected with HIV who were intentionally injecting people with contaminated blood. Because accuracy and care take time, the Trust team offer subsidies to the filmmakers who agree to work with them.

The learning is as important as the final film product, because the goal is to build the skills and knowledge of filmmakers, as well as boost the health education content of individual projects. The *Wetin Dey* soap opera series is also as much about raising standards, both in terms of technical production and storytelling, as it is about communicating specific health messages about HIV

**Part I of this series appeared
in the 4/25/08 issue**

and AIDS.

In a "Making of..." video about the series, Creative Director Akim Mogaji said, "We are trying to break through the fog of what is out there already. And there is a lot on HIV and AIDS."

One of the actors, Tosan Ugbeye, said, "I think the scripts are wonderful in that they've been well woven together. Not too much weight on the 'teachy, preachy' end of it."

A young man chats up a young woman selling fish. It obvious what he's really hungry for.

"I'll put the fish in a plastic bag," she says.

"It's the fish I want to eat, not a plastic bag," he replies.

"A plastic bag's good. It's the plastic bag that will protect the fish. Bad things won't happen," she says.

The subtle reference to condoms is clear, without being "teachy, preachy." In another scene, a teenage soccer player overcomes a series of frustrations to make it into a critical soccer game, where he scores the winning goal. He's

(continued on page 46)

12-Year Results

Hypofractionated Whole-Breast Irradiation Continues to Be Shown as Safe, Effective

By Charlene Laino

SAN ANTONIO—Long-term results of a study of accelerated hypofractionated whole-breast irradiation continue to show

that a 22-day course of radiation is as safe and effective as the standard 35-day schedule that is typically given to patients after lumpectomy, researchers reported at the San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium.

Ten-year results of the study of 1,234 women show that accelerated hypofractionated whole-breast irradiation is associated with excellent local control, said Timothy J. Whelan, MD, Director of the Supportive Cancer Care

Research Unit at the Juravinski Cancer Centre in Hamilton, Ontario.

Additionally, the shorter schedule was not associated with long-term morbidity. The results, which confirm those seen at five years of follow-up, “should

ScriptDoctor

continued from page 45


a hero to his teammates—and gets a cash reward from a coach.

Fast forward to that night: He’s drinking at a local bar, eyeing women, and you can see where the story is going. It feels like one of those horror movies where you want to scream at the characters not to split up, because you know that’s when the monster will strike.

“I think the scripts are wonderful in that they’ve been well woven together. Not too much weight on the ‘teachy, preachy’ end of it.”

At the end of the first episode, I wanted to see more, to find out what happens to these characters I’ve begun to care about. Who succumbs to temptation? Who turns away? What are the results?

That’s the key; the stories create an emotional connection, animating those dry bits of health information the viewers have heard over and over.

It’s one thing to hear the bullet points about HIV prevention. But when viewers bring that knowledge to bear as they react to the TV stories, well, then the lessons take life. 

Further Information

Further information about the programs mentioned in this article as well as about the BBC World Service Trust’s other projects that “use radio, television, the internet, and mobile phones to provide life-saving information to people in need” is available at www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust