



SCRIPT DOCTOR: MEDICINE IN THE MEDIA

Dateline Nigeria (Part 3):

Creating Solutions When Despite Public Service Announcements, Ads, & Documentaries, Many Women Were Still Not Seeking Life-Saving Treatment

By Andrew Holtz, MPH

“**S**ànnu.” That’s “Hello” in Hausa, the dominant language of northern Nigeria and southern Niger. Hausa speakers are predominantly Muslim and there are also strong local traditions. If you think that sometimes your patients don’t seem to really hear what you’ve said, or you don’t understand why a health education campaign does not seem to get through to people in your community...well, just imagine what health educators face in Hausa land.

When I sat down to talk with the head of the BBC World Service Trust’s HIV/AIDS project in Nigeria during a recent visit to Abuja, Christine K and her colleagues had just returned from Kano, in northern Nigeria. They had been summoned by a committee of the Islamic Shari’ah Council there.

“If you want to be on-air at all and you want to have an audience, you cannot, under the current Shari’ah Law regime in Kano state say ‘sex,’” she said.

But how do you talk about HIV without saying ‘sex’? She said you talk about equitable relationships and dat-

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ing advice, for instance, always keeping the focus on what’s relevant and interesting to young listeners of their radio variety show *Ya Take Ne (What’s Up?)*.

“That’s why our program gets up to 70 percent listenership among young people in the north—because for once, and after such a long time, here is a point where people actually talk about the real thing in the real language. The young people were really magnetized by the program,” Christine K said.

And so far they’ve managed to avoid being banned by older gatekeepers. Understanding the audience was also a key to another health campaign

that was created after a well-meaning health care intervention fell short.

Obstetric fistula caused by untreated prolonged or obstructed labor is almost unknown in the United States, but it is dismayingly common in northern Nigeria. Rotary International estimates that about one million women in Nigeria have obstetric fistulae. To try to help, Rotary International helped set up clinics to repair the holes and alleviate the related incontinence, infections, and other injuries.

Tony Asangaeneng, country representative in Nigeria for the Population Media Center of Shelburne, Vermont, explained that Rotary embarked on a comprehensive strategy of building the capacity of health personnel, then equipping hospital facilities, creating access to the facilities, and then communication. All the other components were very successful, but communication was not as effective, he said.

Putting Storytelling First

Despite public service announcements, ads, and documentaries, many women were not seeking treatment. So the Population Media Center helped create a radio soap opera called *Gugar Goge (Tell Me Straight)*. Rather than building



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a media campaign designed to satisfy health experts, the goal from the beginning was to put storytelling first.

The first step was to recruit established radio producers who knew how to write for the local audience, who then together sketched out a story arc. As a result, radio listeners heard stories of people who seemed much like them, who had problems like theirs, who were then moving toward solutions.

Surveys of patients at obstetric fistula clinics found that more than half (54%) said the radio series was their primary motivation for seeking health care services. The surveys also found that among listeners, knowledge of at least one method of contraception jumped from 63% to 76%.

And compared with non-listeners, those who tuned in to *Gugar Goge* were more likely to know where to get condoms, somewhat more likely to have discussed HIV/AIDS with their partners, and more likely to know that

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Bisphosphonates

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marked decrease in bone mineral density as detected in imaging studies or if a patient suffered a fracture.

The three-year results of the study reported at the meeting showed that upfront zoledronic acid increased lumbar spine bone-mineral density—the primary endpoint—by 3.72%. In contrast, there was a mean decline in lumbar spine bone density of 2.95% in the delayed treatment group, resulting in a significant difference of 6.7% in favor of the upfront group, Dr. Brufsky reported.

Additionally, total hip bone-mineral density dropped by an average of 1.66% in the delayed group and rose by

3.51% in the upfront group.

During the question-and-answer period, one attendee said that despite the improvement in bone mineral density among patients in the upfront group, there was not a “big difference” in fracture rates: 5.6% vs 6.35% in the delayed group. Dr. Brufsky replied that if “we had three or four thousand women [enrolled in the study], I think we would see a difference in the fracture rates.”

IBIS-II

The ongoing Bone Substudy of the placebo-controlled IBIS-II involves 250 women enrolled in a clinical trial testing whether anastrozole can help to prevent breast cancer in high-risk

women.

A pre-planned safety analysis at one year showed that women with normal bone mineral density at the start of the study who were not given risendronate lost a significant amount of bone density at both the lumbar spine and the total hip—whether they were taking anastrozole or placebo.

“For the lumbar spine, the loss was significantly greater with anastrozole,” said Shalini Singh, MD, a researcher in the Cancer Research UK Epidemiology, Mathematics, and Statistics Unit at the Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine in London.

In contrast, “for women initially osteopenic or osteoporotic, concomitant risendronate appeared to abrogate the bone mineral density loss associated

with anastrozole,” Dr. Singh said.

Oral vs. IV

Eric P. Winer, MD, Director of the Breast Oncology Center in the Department of Adult Oncology at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, said that “most oncologists tend to reach for oral bisphosphonates first because of the ease of administration and the extensive experience with these agents in the treatment of osteoporosis, albeit outside of the context of aromatase inhibitor therapy.”

However, Dr. Brufsky said while oral bisphosphonates have proven efficacy in treating postmenopausal osteoporosis, “they are not always well tolerated, and compliance can be a problem.”



IP Therapy Still Overlooked for Ovarian Cancer

By Brande Victorian

NEW YORK CITY—Issues of toxicity and complexity continue to cause intraperitoneal therapy to be overlooked by clinicians in the treatment of ovarian cancer despite the potential to dramatically increase overall survival. So said presenters here at the Chemotherapy Foundation Symposium in discussions that reviewed the latest therapeutic research.

Regarding the history of the technique, Maurie Markman, MD, Vice President for Clinical Research and Professor and Chair of Gynecologic Medical Oncology at the University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center, noted that since ovarian cancer mostly remains confined to the peritoneal cavity, researchers in the early 1950s introduced the idea of administering chemotherapy intraperitoneally. However,

Issues of toxicity and complexity continue to concern clinicians in deciding about using intraperitoneal therapy for ovarian cancer.

because of the toxicity of the available chemotherapeutic agents at the time and the ability to deliver drugs intravenously, the concept was largely

abandoned.

It wasn't until 1978 that the concept reemerged with a study by Robert Dedrick, PhD, et al published in *Cancer Therapy Reports* indicating that certain drugs placed in the peritoneal cavity could exhibit dramatic pharmacokinetic advantage for the tumor present in that compartment of the body.

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pregnancy carries health risks for women.

'See the Characters as Human Beings'

"One striking thing that surprises me every day is that people can actually identify our characters, people can actually tell you the circumstances, people see the characters as human beings," Asangaeneng said, adding that the characters have become role models, their names entering everyday conversations.

The believability of the characters sometimes even has consequences for the actors.

"I remember once in Tanzania, during a [Population Media Center] program," Asangaeneng recalled, "the actor of a particular character that was against gender equity was pelted with tomatoes by women in the market, because they believed his actions were real. They never even considered he was [acting] in the context of a drama."

