



ELSEVIER



www.elsevier.com/locate/precon

SHORT COMMUNICATION

Building awareness through a social marketing project in Russia

Helen Alderson

Director of Development, World Heart Federation

Received 13 June 2005

Available online 27 December 2005

The burden of cardiovascular disease in the Russian Federation

The Russian Federation has one of the highest rates of death and disability due to cardiovascular disease in the world. Cardiovascular disease is responsible for 55% of all deaths and for over 30% of deaths in people under the age of 65. This situation can be explained to a large extent by lifestyle determinants, in addition to which, research shows, there is a generally passive, even fatalistic, perception among individuals that health is a "treasure" which is, or is not, bestowed upon us. There is little realization that one can take responsibility for one's own health.

In order to address this situation, the World Heart Federation, in partnership with the Russian Society of Cardiology, carried out a pilot social marketing project in the central Russian city of Ekaterinburg. The project aimed to increase awareness and change attitudes regarding the risk factors for cardiovascular disease and the potential for an individual to prevent the onset of disease in general and cardiovascular disease in particular. It also sought to increase the involvement of health professionals in counselling patients about heart-healthy lifestyles and prevention of disease.

Baseline survey

In June/July 2004, a baseline survey was carried out in Ekaterinburg and in the control city of Samara, which has a similar demographic and socioeconomic profile.

"Keep Your Heart Healthy!" campaign

Following the summer break, the Russian Society of Cardiology organized a four-day training course in preventive cardiology and risk-factor counselling for selected doctors, most of whom work in polyclinics. As part of the campaign, the doctors who followed the course all committed themselves to giving at least three public lectures in factories, clubs, universities, etc., in order to raise public awareness.

The actual campaign, which was due to last until mid-December 2004, was launched on 20 September 2004 at a press conference in the Ekaterinburg City Hall. On the days following the press launch, public screening of blood pressure, cholesterol and body mass index was organized all over town in shopping centres, factories, the university and public administration buildings. In all, over 5200 people benefited from this service.



Involvement of the media is the cornerstone of any social marketing campaign. A great deal of effort was therefore put into working with the very dynamic local media to help them understand the issues and convey the message. This included a three-day ‘‘Health School for Journalists’’, which was received with great enthusiasm. The results have been impressive as far as media coverage is concerned, with 185 features on TV and radio and in the print media over the first six weeks alone.

A number of local VIPs and famous people added their voices to the campaign. Thus, the beauty queen Miss Ekaterinburg gave advice on smoke-free healthy lifestyles and a hockey champion and body-builder encouraged young people to keep moving and do sports, even if they are not particularly sporty.

Among the many features of the campaign was a TV advertisement featuring a charismatic witch who shows just how easy it is to harm our hearts. A hotline was also set up for people to phone in for information and advice.

One of the difficulties in such a campaign is keeping up the momentum following the initial launch and public activities. The World Heart Federation has been delighted at the way in which the City Healthcare Department developed new and original activities as the campaign unfolded, such as seminars on smoking cessation; sessions held in schools aimed at helping children say ‘‘no’’ to peer pressure to smoke or drink; and belly dancing classes for women of all ages.

Endline survey and project sustainability

In mid-December, an endline survey was carried out both in Ekaterinburg and at the control site

to assess the impact and effectiveness of the campaign. The detailed analysis of the results is still ongoing and will be published. However, certain initial observations can be made, among which:

- 44% of respondents recalled one or more elements of the campaign, which can be considered as very high; 77% of these assessed the campaign as good or very good.
- Among these 44%, the main messages of the campaign were understood; 61% of them demonstrated the intent to adopt a healthier lifestyle and 20% declared having already made changes for the better.
- The understanding of cardiovascular disease and hypertension as a risk factor had increased (+4% and +6% respectively) among all the respondents.
- However, there was no improvement in the low level of lifestyle counselling given by doctors regarding weight management and tobacco, the positive exception being the significant increase in advice related to the reduction of salt consumption (+17%).
- Neither did the campaign seem to have much impact on the already low level of awareness regarding nutrition.

The detailed analysis of the results which is currently taking place will enable all the partners involved, and in particular the City Healthcare Department and the Russian Society of Cardiology to build on the methodology, lessons learned and successes of this initial campaign and develop it further in Ekaterinburg, and later, hopefully, elsewhere in Russia.

