



“Life Preserver” A Public Service Campaign Urging People With Diabetes To Get a Flu Shot.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Situation

A recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention surveillance report found an alarming trend involving persons people with diabetes: up to 30,000 die each year because they do not get a simple vaccination. Having diabetes requires more than just treating the disease; people must also protect themselves from other health concerns, many of which are preventable like the flu. CDC asked Prospect Associates to develop a public service campaign to inform persons with diabetes about this increased risk.

Research

A situation analysis showed that a great deal had already been done to raise awareness of specific risks of diabetes, such as foot and eye care, by organizations like the American Diabetes Association. However, no group had focused specifically on the fact that persons with diabetes are more vulnerable to common, seasonal health risks.

CDC’s own national epidemiologic research showed that persons with diabetes are at greater risk both of getting and of dying from the flu and pneumonia. Each year 10,000 to 30,000 persons with diabetes die from flu or pneumonia complications.

Health Styles research, purchased by CDC, also revealed that only 40 percent of people with diabetes get an annual flu shot, leaving a large at-risk population for whom a flu

shot would be a simple, safe, and inexpensive preventive measure.

To carry the message through public health channels as well as through media, CDC polled Diabetes Control Program (DCPs) directors in every State on their ability to deliver this message on the local level. More than 70 percent reported wanting to implement a communication campaign on this as a new goal. Clearly, we needed to build their capacity to do this, since they were motivated but unskilled, and to maintain a consistent message across all States.

Because persons with diabetes are our ultimate audience, we held focus groups to evaluate their knowledge about flu, flu shots, and their disease. We found very little awareness about this risk. Focus group insights became key to the creative campaign elements.

Planning

The need for persons with diabetes to get a flu shot became the first message in an umbrella campaign to encourage them to take better care of their overall health. To do this, our objectives were (1) to build up the capacity of States to deliver the campaign message, (2) to gain 50 percent participation by States in the first year, (3) to raise awareness that persons with diabetes are at greater risk than the general population of getting and dying from illnesses such as the flu, and (4) to motivate them to get an annual flu shot.

The target audiences were defined as State DCPs; persons with diabetes (primarily those ages 25 to 54, including African American and Latin American populations); persons impacted by the disease, e.g., family members; and health care providers caring for persons with diabetes.

To integrate health care partners to help make flu shots available to persons with diabetes, the program was first piloted in four States and, upon evaluation, refined and rolled out nationally just before flu season. The States were asked to work with managed care organizations, retailers, and other intermediaries, as well as the State immunization program director and public health information officer, to use their networks to educate persons with diabetes about flu.

Two sessions were held to train DCPs to conduct the communication program. The first training session was held at the CDC Annual Diabetes Conference, and the second satellite training session was beamed to all States via satellite broadcast just before launching the program.

The overall campaign budget was \$700,000.

Execution

Using a creative platform that could eventually cover multiple risks and prevention steps in future campaigns, Prospect Associates developed the campaign theme “*Diabetes. One Disease. Many Risks.*” The tagline “*With Diabetes, Prevention is Control*” underscores that diabetes is a disease that can be controlled with some simple preventive measures. Several creative concepts were tested with persons with diabetes to ensure effectiveness. The final concept used the visual metaphor of a life preserver to

communicate the significance of a flu shot to people with diabetes.

Prospect created materials in English and Spanish for four components used at national and local levels:

- **News media relations:** Press kits outlining the connection between diabetes and the flu were developed and distributed to the top 1,200 English and Hispanic news media. DCPs also received press kits to use for smaller markets. The Spanish release was sent to Hispanic media with diabetes and flu information specific to the population. A pre-printed newspaper story in English, in Spanish, and tailored for African Americans was mailed to smaller weekly newspapers. The news release was sent over the news wire, and top media were contacted.
- **Public service advertising:** Television, radio, and print PSAs were created and sent to public service directors. The television PSA used verbatims from the focus groups. In the words of one participant, “A flu shot? Guess you could say it’s like a life preserver when you have diabetes.” A strong call to action said to “see your doctor about getting a flu shot today.” Teaser packaging showed the life preserver with the line “Open this package to save thousands of lives” to entice busy public service directors to use the PSAs. Special radio and print PSAs created to reach African Americans with diabetes were directed to media reaching them.
- **Consumer and health care provider materials:** Nearly 1 million consumer information brochures and posters for health care providers’ waiting rooms were printed and sent to States for distribution.

- **State implementation kits:** Kits were created to guide the state DCPs and their local partners (county health departments, managed care organizations, etc.) as they implemented the campaign on a local level. Included were specific tips on developing story angles, interviewing, and pitching, as well as sample press releases and pitch letters. Such materials kept the message consistent in all States.

Evaluation

Goal 1: To build up capacity of State DCPs to deliver the campaign message: The two events to increase DCP skill levels were extremely popular. More than 100 people attended the training at the CDC Diabetes Annual Conference. Then, a national satellite training session for DCPs and their state partners was held before the launch. A total of 26 States participated, of which 98 percent reported that the training built their capacity to implement the program, and 94 percent said it also taught them how to take the message to the media.

Goal 2: To gain 50 percent participation by States in the first year: Postcampaign evaluation surveys showed that 31 States

participated to bring the message to local markets, 12 percent more than our original goal.

Goal 3: To raise awareness among persons with diabetes of the risk from the flu: Process evaluation indicated that the message was widely disseminated, reaching 83 million, or 33 percent, of the U.S. population. Stories appeared on AP, Reuters, and CNN and in the *Washington Post*.

The television PSA aired 10,911 times, and the radio PSA 91,618 times in 49 States. The print PSA reached more than 12 million people, even running in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Goal 4: Motivate people with diabetes to get an annual flu shot. Although process measures paint a convincing picture, the ultimate measure of the program's success, the number of persons with diabetes who received a flu shot, is evaluated on an annual basis by states.

However, since the State DCPs and CDC are so firmly behind delivering the message to persons with diabetes, the campaign will be conducted again in fall 2000.