



Health Communication Evaluation Services

Task 68
Hepatitis C – Health Communication Initiative

Results of Hepatitis C Message Testing: Focus Group Research with Transfusion Recipients

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RESULTS OF HEPATITIS C MESSAGE TESTING FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH WITH TRANSFUSION RECIPIENTS

1. Purpose of the Study

Westat conducted three message-testing focus groups with transfusion recipients. These focus groups were held to provide formative research that can lead to the development of effective communication strategies. The research was designed to obtain the following information from participants:

- Reactions to messages----print public service announcements (PSAs) and brochure;
- Knowledge/awareness of hepatitis C and hepatitis C testing;
- Channels; and
- Settings and barriers for hepatitis C testing.

The moderator's guide is included in Appendix A.

2. Background

Three focus groups were conducted on April 7 and 8, 1999, with 25 participants. All of the participants had had at least one blood transfusion between 1970 and 1990 and were 35 to 60 years of age. One group with mixed race/ethnicity participants, and one with Hispanic participants were conducted in Long Beach, California; a second mixed race/ethnicity group was held in Baltimore, Maryland.

The focus group discussed three print PSAs---Chloe, Jack, and Sylvia---and one brochure (see Appendix B). A non-Hispanic white female moderated the mixed group in Baltimore, and a Hispanic male conducted the Hispanic and the mixed urban group in Long Beach. The two mixed groups were conducted in English; the Hispanic group was conducted in Spanish. All focus groups lasted about 100 minutes. At the end of each group, a CDC expert on hepatitis C was available to address any questions posed by the participants. All participants received a \$75 cash incentive. The screener can be found in Appendix B.

3. Summary of Findings

During the sessions, the print PSAs and the brochure were presented and discussed with focus group participants separately. Results of the discussion from each of these campaign materials are reported in Section IV of this report. The most interesting focus group findings are as follows:

- The three PSAs and the brochure captured the attention of participants and were perceived as appealing and informative.
- For all three groups, the overall reaction to the brochure was very positive.
- Participants felt more motivated by the brochure than by the PSAs to seek more information and testing.
- Of the two taglines, participants preferred *Ask your doctor if you or your loved ones should be tested for hepatitis C.*
- Most participants would prefer to go to their doctors than to a clinic for hepatitis C testing.
- Some participants were concerned about the stigma associated with STD hotlines.
- Most participants would not go to an HIV/AIDS clinic for hepatitis C information or testing.
- The symbol was perceived very positively by all of the groups.

Implications for Materials Development

The PSAs and the brochure were described as believable, informative, and important. Focus group participants felt that transfusion recipients would be motivated to seek hepatitis C testing from reading the brochure. Overall, they indicated that the brochure and the PSAs were both personally relevant and motivational.

According to participants, displaying the date “before July 1992” and the words “blood transfusion” on the front of the brochure were key items that captured their attention. The hepatitis C print PSAs and brochure are educational materials that should be used in conjunction with other media and public education materials such as an Internet website, magazines, radio PSAs, Spanish print and radio PSAs, and transit ads. This could more effectively raise awareness and increase knowledge among the target audience.

The following is a brief overview of all findings identified during the focus groups.

4. Focus Group Discussion

Reactions to Print PSAs

- Participants indicated the PSAs were informative and believable. In particular, the mention of the date July 1992, blood transfusion, and toll-free telephone number caught their attention.
- Hispanic participants felt the PSAs were believable, but a few stated the PSAs were not appealing to them. Several of the Hispanics stated that they do not identify with the images of the persons in the PSAs.
- Participants perceived the print PSAs as personally relevant and motivational. The text and images of the PSAs conveyed the message to get tested for hepatitis C.
- Respondents from the mixed race/ethnicity group in Long Beach indicated the text in the PSAs rather than the images would motivate them to call the hotline or their doctors and to share the information in the PSAs with others. They also mentioned the PSAs created a sense of urgency without frightening them.
- Hispanic respondents appreciated having the material in Spanish. This made the information more appealing and clear for them.
- Participants stated the PSAs would motivate them to:
 - Request information about hepatitis C;
 - Call the toll-free number;
 - Go see their doctor; and
 - Get tested.
- Respondents acknowledged the three PSAs provided important information. The information that resonated with them included:
 - They may be at risk for hepatitis C;
 - A hotline is available;
 - There is a need to get tested for hepatitis C; and
 - Hepatitis C can cause liver damage.
- The symbol (“Hepatitis C – You may be at risk if you had a blood transfusion before 1992”) was attention getting and motivational.

- Overall, the respondents from the mixed group in Long Beach felt the information provided in these print PSAs was clear, believable, and important. However, a few of them did not consider the information to be attention getting as they were unable to relate to the images and situations presented. They said they would like to have more details presented about hepatitis C and less storytelling.
- Comments from the groups included the following:
 - *It did feel like this was speaking to me. I haven't been tested. Now I know it is serious and will go get tested. Like Monday morning.* (mixed, Baltimore)
 - *All of them [Chloe, Jack, Sylvia] received transfusions and all of them could have suffered or acquired hepatitis C. That's the message here, that any person that received a transfusion before 1992 may have hepatitis C.* (Hispanic)
 - *I related to the text because I had a transfusion prior to 1992. I don't know if any of the individual pictures really worked in getting my attention.* (mixed, Long Beach)

Reactions to print PSA taglines. Participants preferred the tagline, “Ask your doctor if you or your loved ones should be tested for hepatitis C” as opposed to “The sooner you find out, the more you can do.”

Participants' suggestions. Overall, respondents had the following suggestions for the PSAs.

- Move the symbol to a more prominent section of the PSAs.
- Use larger fonts and more colors.
- Make the phone number larger and print it in red.
- Use an image of people that represent multiple races/ethnicities.
- Use all numbers (1-888-443-7232) rather than the mix of number and letters (1-888-4HEPCDC) for the phone number.
- Highlight the text “hepatitis C, a disease that can damage your liver and cause it to fail.”
- Print “You may be at risk if you had a blood transfusion before 1992” in big, block letters.

- Shorten the second sentence in the main text of the Jack PSA because it is too long and confusing.
- List the symptoms of hepatitis C.

Reactions to the Brochure

- Participants from all of the groups agreed that the brochure was appealing and motivational. In particular, participants reacted positively to the symbol on the front of the brochure.
- Participants from the mixed group in Baltimore thought the brochure, like the PSAs, was personally relevant and motivating. The large symbol and text on the front cover made the brochure appealing.
- In all of the groups, participants mentioned the brochure is asking them to do the following:
 - Call or visit their doctor;
 - Become more aware;
 - Get tested; and
 - Prevent spread to others.
- The information on the back of the brochure was especially appealing to the participants. They liked the hotline number and the invitation to call their doctors.
- Participants mentioned the brochure was clear, believable, motivational and informative. They said the yellow “yield” sign in the symbol caught their attention and made them read further. They commented that the information was direct and would motivate them to learn more about hepatitis C.
- The statement in the brochure regarding the effectiveness of treatment for chronic hepatitis C in only 3 out of 10 persons raised enough concern to create a sense of urgency in the Hispanic group.
- After reading the materials presented in the focus group, most of the Hispanic respondents indicated that they would consider being tested so that they could be free from doubts and worries about hepatitis C.

- The brochure provided new and useful information to respondents, including:
 - The hepatitis hotline number;
 - The July, 1992 date;
 - That transfusion recipients may be at risk;
 - Effectiveness of treatment;
 - How hepatitis C is spread especially, from an infected mother to her baby during birth; and
 - That hepatitis C can damage the liver and cause it to fail.
- Key comments included the following:
 - *It reinforces my feelings as far as the urgency to get tested immediately.* (mixed, Baltimore)
 - *The brochure motivates me to call my doctor but does not make me so anxious. Well, the next time I go to the doctor's office, I will ask for the special blood test.* (mixed, Long Beach)
 - *The brochure has good focused information. It is much clearer. It makes you feel more aware. It makes you want to go to the doctor.* (Hispanic)

Participants' suggestions. Participants offered the following suggestions for the brochure:

- Include only one image. Make it more relevant and appealing by showing an image of a doctor and patient talking.
- Show a photograph including all races to indicate that hepatitis C could happen to anyone.
- Include information on where to go for testing and the availability of liver transplants.
- Increase font size of the text.
- Use more colors.
- Remove images [Chloe, Jack, and Sylvia] and add more information on hepatitis C.
- For the Spanish version of the brochure, make it clear and evident that many persons who have hepatitis C have no symptoms. Some of the Hispanic participants did not seem to get the idea that most participants have no symptoms because they repeatedly requested a listing of the "common symptoms."

Awareness and Knowledge of Hepatitis C

- Some of the participants had heard of hepatitis C before the focus group. However, some people were unaware of their personal risk as transfusion recipients until the focus group.
- A few of the respondents in the mixed group from Long Beach knew hepatitis C could be spread by sexual contact; however, there also was the misconception that only alcoholics and injection drug users were at risk.
- Some of the Hispanic participants knew there was no cure, that hepatitis C affects the liver, that it can come from transfusions, and that people who have it are prone to extreme tiredness.
- Sources of information mentioned by the mixed group participants from Long Beach were:
 - Local university
 - Newspapers
 - Doctors
 - Hospitals
 - Television
 - Family members and friends who have hepatitis C
 - Clinics

Channels

- Respondents from the mixed group in Long Beach suggested the following possible information channels for materials about hepatitis C:
 - Doctors' offices
 - Malls
 - Billboards
 - Local newspapers
 - Library
 - Television
 - Pharmacies
 - Blood banks
 - Worksites
 - Bus stops
 - Public restrooms
 - Churches
 - Post office
 - Magazines
 - Internet website
 - Schools

Settings for and Barriers to Hepatitis C Testing

- Most respondents said they would prefer to go to their doctors for hepatitis C information and testing.
- None of the participants from the mixed Long Beach group said they would go to an HIV/AIDS clinic for hepatitis C testing. They considered these clinics to be unsanitary and impersonal.

- Most Hispanics would be willing to go to a local clinic to seek further information about hepatitis C. However, a few respondents mentioned they would go to an HIV/AIDS clinic for either hepatitis C information or testing. They said that HIV/AIDS clinics were a good alternative for people who do not have health insurance.
- Some of the participants from the mixed groups in Baltimore and Long Beach were concerned about the cost of testing and counseling and whether their insurance would cover the expenses.
- Participants in the mixed group from Long Beach felt that a stigma was associated with HIV/AIDS hotlines.

APPENDIX A

MODERATOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

APPENDIX B

SCREENER

APPENDIX C

PRINT PSAs AND BROCHURE