UNIT-14 : HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATION

UNIT STRUCTURE

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14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES :

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- understand the basics of health communication and its growing significance in the present-day world

- analyse various issues related to this field right from health advisories to sources of authentic news in this field
- assess the advantages and bottlenecks in executing health communication and healthcare delivery to the people at grassroots level
- understand the different nuances of the patient-physician communication and its implications in well-being of the people
- get an idea about the communication strategies taken up by organizations and institutions for delivering health advisory to the target audience
- get a brief overview of the meaning of Environmental health and its importance for humankind

14.2 INTRODUCTION :

At the very outset, let us try to understand what is meant by the term Health.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines Health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. This concept includes all the three major components of the system which combined together only make up for normal parameters to judge a healthy person. Further, it is not only adequate to enjoy only either physical or mental or social well-being. All the three aspects need to be present in tandem for a society to be termed as a healthy society. There is this common proverb – Health is wealth. Unless there is a close and positive coordination of all these three sides, we can't term that person or society as a healthy one.

14.3 MEANING OF HEALTH COMMUNICATION

Health communication is an area of study that examines how the use of different communication strategies can keep people informed about their health and influence their behaviour so that they can live healthier lives. It draws from many theories and disciplines, including social, cognitive and communication theories, marketing, and public relations. (School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, Tulane University, USA)

Prior to explaining this term, it will be convenient to go through a definition of the term by a premier organization in this regard. The Society for Health Communication (SHC) defines it as the science and art of using communication to advance the health and well-being of people and populations. Further, it is a multidisciplinary field of study and practice that applies communication evidence, strategy, theory, and creativity to promote behaviours, policies, and

practices that advance the health and well-being of people and populations. (SHC website, 2017).

Now, what is Communication for Health ? In other words, what is there to be communicated in this field and why is the express need to study communication for delivering healthcare and related messages or information?

This aspect can be considered in two very broad categories.

First of all, it is at a micro or individual level - communication between a patient or potential patient and a physician or any other health worker – be it a nurse, pharmacist or others concerned. We all know that a sympathetic and empathetic behaviour towards a patient by a health worker led by the physician is of utmost importance in giving solace to the patient. Such a behaviour goes a long way to inculcate a feel of confidence in the minds of the patients that the doctor is seriously trying to understand the problem and finding a solution. Further, not only diagnosis, there are other important aspects also. Such as how to take up medication, control of diet, precautions, details of care to be conducted by the immediate family or caretakers of the patient are also equally important for proper recovery of the patients etc. Hence, the communication aspect is so significant in this relationship. The trust between the patient and health worker has to be above any doubt so that the doctor can come to proper conclusion about the diagnosis. Here, in an ideal situation, there must not be any 'noise' or barrier in the communication. Otherwise, there shall not be effective diagnosis and medication.

It may be mentioned here that the Medical Council of India, the highest decision-making authority in the academic programmes of study of medical areas, has come up with the AETCOM guidelines (2018). This is an abbreviation of the terms – Attitude, Ethics and Communication. These are actually included in the Graduate Medical Education Regulations (2017). Here, point no.2.3 entails the important role of a physician as a "Communicator with patients, families, colleagues and community".
The role is further explained in point 3.31 – 3.3.4 of the same document. Among various aspects, it includes –

- Demonstrating ability to communicate adequately, sensitively, effectively and respectfully with patients in a language that the latter understands and in a manner that will improve patient satisfaction and health care outcomes,
- Professional relationship with patients and families that are positive, understanding,

humane, ethical, empathetic, and ability to communicate with patients in a manner respectful of patient's preferences, values, prior experience, beliefs, confidentiality and privacy.

- Demonstrate ability to communicate with patients, colleagues and families in a manner that encourages participation and shared decision-making. (MCI-AETCOM).

Secondly, at a macro level, health-related communication towards the society, community at a broader level for inculcating a certain point about prevention. This is because we all know that 'prevention is always better than cure' of any disease or ailment in any society across the world. Let us consider a scenario in this regard. Suppose a situation of communicable diseases is prevailing at a certain area. There, if some individuals and families take proper precaution and prevention about the disease they would be in a safer position. However, if even some of the people or families (which may not even be more than half of the population) don't observe the same precaution, there won't be any point for the families who are observing it. Hence, unless the entire society or community as a whole takes up precautionary measures, the disease would definitely spread without any resistance. Under such circumstances, what is to be done. The COVID19 pandemic situation has very effectively demonstrated how all members of the society cutting across any area, caste, creed etc. need to take up preventive measures to stop further spread of the disease. Thus, quarantine, home attachment or isolation etc. systems were devised and the importance of these also needed to be disseminated to the people at large.

COVID19 is just a small example of so many other health-related problems in the society which need to be communicated to people constantly for preventing the situation from getting worse. Let's pick up a few usual examples ---

- After Independence, in the 1960s till about the 1980s, in our country a health communication campaign had to be carried out aimed at the population about having preferably only one child for preventing an explosion in population
- Prescribing quinine pills for preventing malaria, use of iodized salt against goitre
- 'Do boond zindagi ke' – the much popular Pulse Polio Immunisation campaign etc.

Even in the present day times, newer challenges are confronting the society. Such as – the express need for advising people about the hazards of excessive exposure to electronic and digital gadgets, living a harmonious and balanced life for preventing the so-called lifestyle diseases, need for some amount of exercises on a daily basis (whether free hand or with instruments), reduce intake of tobacco products, liquor etc.

14.3.1 Community Medicine

This is an important concept in the field of health and medicine which is concerned with the prevention of disease, the determinants and natural history of disease in populations and the influence of the environment and of society on health and disease. The community medicine practitioner is devoted to preventing the occurrence of complaints in the population (Mackenzie, 1983). Medical colleges and universities do have separate departments for this aspect. It aims at devising various systems for treating diseases and health problems from a community-oriented perspective rather than treating them as individual or single family-oriented problem. The objective is that a holistic approach can be taken up to address the issues in the short and long run. Further, Dr Edmond Fernandes, a veteran of this system in an article in The Times of India (Lifestyle, July 3, 2017) says that Community Medicine is understood by different names - Social Medicine, Preventive Medicine, Public Health, Community Health. The ultimate aim is to tackle the community's health and medicine issues as a whole. This is in contrast with to taking an individualistic view of many of the medical problems which need a broader treatment like COVID 19, Pulse Polio, Obesity etc.

So, this is also one area of health communication that would be important in the near and distant future also. If the entire community or society can be enlightened about preventive and precautionary measures then the individuals and families would automatically become enlightened. Thus, they would be empowered to face that particular health issue. This is the underlying idea behind introducing Community Medicine in the field of medical sciences. A lot of its success also depends on how successfully communication campaigns are carried out in this direction.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1 : What is health communication ?

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Q.2 : What are the guidelines for effective health communication ?

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Q.3 : What is community medicine ?

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14.3.2 Communication for Health initiative of WHO

While discussing health communication in general, it would not be complete without taking into consideration, the initiatives of the World Health Organization (WHO) which has been spearheading a global movement in this field. It has come up with the concept of Communication for Health (C4H). This system is fully dedicated towards applying various parameters of communication for expanding awareness and inculcation of effective understanding in health and related areas to the masses at all levels of the society.

"Effective, integrated and coordinated communications are integral to achieve WHO's goal of building a healthier future and deliver on its mission to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable. This Framework describes a strategic approach for effectively communicating WHO information, advice and guidance across a broad range of health issues: from chronic diseases to emerging and novel risks." (WHO website).

It also says that it communicates with a wide variety of decision-makers with some of them having backgrounds in medicine and public health and rely on WHO for technical information. However, as many key audiences are not technical experts, communicators must provide information that is easy to understand so that decision-makers comprehend health risks and take appropriate action. (WHO website).

The organization has established that for C4H to be effective and meaningful it has to follow the following six principles ---

- Accessible – Whatever information is intended to be made available to the targeted audience must be in a media or platform that has to be accessible easily. Otherwise, there would be no meaning for even very highly-important or relevant information or message.

- Relevant – It has to be relevant to the particular issue of that specific time period. Because, if authorities or sources concerned talk about an issue that is not a current one, people would be at a loss about using it.
- Actionable – The messages need to be of such characteristic that the receiver can act proactive after realizing the importance of it for his or her own situation.
- Timely – This is highly important as diseases or health and medicine-related issues need to be tackled at a real-time manner. If messages or communication strategies are prepared and conducted much after any disease has actually occurred, there would be no point in doing the exercise at all.
- Credible – Credibility is of utmost importance again. Otherwise how would a person act on the information or messages received if there is doubt about their veracity or authenticity.
- Understandable – In science communication, it is said that something that has to be communicated needs to be understandable for the target audience's standard. Hence, however complicated some findings might be, it has to be prepared in a language that is easily understandable to the patients or communities targeted.

If all these six principles are followed properly, there is maximum possibility that the campaigns shall be successful to a big extent.

Guidelines form a major component of the health communication domain as these are important for guiding people towards a healthy lifestyle. These can range from simple to sophisticated ones. In this regard, there may be general guidelines with potential impacts of far-reaching effects. Or those on short-term necessity depending upon the sudden emergent situations also.

14.4 HEALTH COMMUNICATION ISSUES RELATED TO THE FIELD OF MEDICINE

There are several important issues in the field of medicine in health communication which needs a thorough study.

First of all – there is the issue of 'generic' versus 'branded' medicine available in the open market. .

According to a declaration of the US Food and Drugs Administration (FDA) - A generic drug is a medication created to be the same as an already marketed brand-name drug in dosage form, safety, strength, route of administration, quality, performance characteristics, and intended use. These similarities help to demonstrate bioequivalence, which means that a generic medicine works in the same way and provides the same clinical benefit as the brand-name medicine. In other words, you can take a generic medicine as an equal substitute for its brand-name counterpart.

An article by Ranit Mishori in The Washington Post (July 11, 2011) informs that generic drugs are cheaper than brand-name medicine as its manufacturers don't face the same costs like that of brand-name drugs. That's because the brand-name maker often invented the drug, a process that can cost hundreds of millions of dollars. This is the rationale behind drug patents. They give pharmaceutical companies a period of years when only they can make money on a product in which they have made a large investment. But in reality, most of the people may not know this fact and end up spending a lot of money unnecessarily on branded medicine. But, generic medicine would have been sufficient enough for their health problems.

Besides, any particular medicine requires several rigorous stages of testing following development of the drug in the laboratories. There are stages of animal and human trials which have to be successful for filing for patent and licence before selling it in the open market. It may require several years before a certain drug becomes ready to be put in the market. Besides, in every country there is a government agency in this regard to whom medicine companies have to apply for licence for launching a new medicine. This agency, after observing all the necessary paper works and results etc. would decide on whether to issue licence or not for that medicine.

However, at times, some of the companies may try to cut corners by making false claims to get the licence. And also they may launch the medicine in a discreet manner even without applying for a licence. If detected, these may call for severe penal action as medicines involve the lives of so many thousands of people.

Again, it has also been seen that some medicine even after their launch in the market observing all necessary steps reflect major problems once people start using them. In that case also, if a petition is filed by any organization or individual there is provision for reviewing the licence it was granted and may lead to revoking of the same if necessary.

Besides, some of the medicines for a particular health condition may have major side effects while some others for the same disease may have far less of it. The health workers concerned including the physician, nurse, pharmacist etc. need to seriously observe these conditions and report immediately to the physician so that medicine can be altered. Hence, communication to the patients is so important.

In the world of medicine, some of the drugs over the decades have established themselves as highly prominent and popular brand names thereby prompting people to identify and use them on a usual basis. On the other hand, there may be many options available in the generic drugs which would come much cheaper without any harmful side effects. But a nexus between pharmaceutical companies and physicians prescribing medicine may be possible. So, many a times patients are left with no choice but to buy those medicines asked by the doctors. Besides, from time to time news items are seen about some hospitals charging much more than the market price of the medicine supplied to patients undergoing treatment in those hospitals.

Further, the chain of health workers right from the physician to the nurses also need to be conversant with the communication principles prescribed for the physicians. This is because initially for health issues, the doctor diagnoses and prescribes a specific kind of treatment to the patient including medicine. From this point, these frontline health workers have to carry on the responsibility of administering proper treatment to the patients.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.4 : What is the role of WHO in health communication ?

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Q.5 : What is Communication for Health initiative ?

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Q.6 : Give examples of a few issues related to the field of medicine.

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14.5 DELIVERY OF HEALTHCARE

While the country has made a lot of progress in the field of health care at all levels, yet a few lacuna remain there which causes a lot of bottlenecks in implementing the plans and policies. In an article in Business World (August 21, 2020), Satyendra Johari opines that "the general health advisory may not solve the root cause of the illness and may invariably add up to an escalated cost owing to a prolonged treatment process." The writer further says that a 'very little or no focus at all is dedicated to preventive health care in the country which could have solved a lot of problems for the general public.

Also, it must be mentioned here that a number of health facilities including grassroots level health centres at nook and corners of the country have grown manifold. However, for many different related factors, it has not been possible to equip all these centres with adequate facilities, manpower etc. This has been causing a deterrent for people to visit them when there is a need. Thus, they need to be addressed prior to or at least at the time of planning such facilities. Otherwise, health care is becoming highly costly with all sophisticated facilities being provided mostly by the private sector with a profit motive only. The National Health Mission (NHM) with its sub units National Rural Health Mission and National Urban Health Mission has been carrying out its responsibilities towards expanding health care facilities to the maximum possible population segment. However, more efforts on the government side are needed for catering to such a huge population across the length and breadth of the nation.

14.6 SOURCES OF NEWS ON HEALTH ISSUES

As this is a special and highly sophisticated area, there are very less sources of news on different health and related aspects for the common people. Of course, there are scientific journals like Lancet, The British medical Journal which are globally-renowned scholarly journals in different specific fields of the domain. However, for the common man's usage there are limited sources of health and related news which are sometimes disseminated by newspapers, websites, portals etc. Again, many a times the question of establishing authenticity of the information and claims in these sources need to be verified before consuming their messages. In Guwahati, an established private hospital came out with the idea of a general magazine on health-related issues in Assamese which proved to be effective and popular for quite a few years by now. Many TV and Radio channels also feature health-related programmes for peoples' benefit. At this point, mention must be made of a successful and effective TV programme on health issues named Kalyani. It was broadcast by Doordarshan for several years in its national channels in

the decade of the 2000. The major regional centres of DDK broadcast this programme with local languages and inputs. It happened in a convenient manner for the understanding of the people of all categories of the society. For a particular episode, a specific health issue was selected and more than one expert physicians in that field would be invited to the studio for a brief introduction about the problem. There would be an anchor who would ask questions about the disease. Dedicated telephone lines would be open for allowing intending patients or somebody interested in knowing about it to call up the people in the studio. The physicians would offer instant advise whenever possible or ask them to consult a doctor offline as the case may be. As the programme was in regional languages of the states, it proved to be highly popular and many people could get preliminary advice on different diseases and lifestyle problems.

At this point, proper care also needs to be taken for avoiding the dangers of 'infodemic' causing problems to the people. This is a term that came into existence in the initial periods of COVID-19 pandemic. WHO describes it as - "too much information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak. It causes confusion and risk-taking behaviours that can harm health. It also leads to mistrust in health authorities and undermines the public health response. An infodemic can intensify or lengthen outbreaks when people are unsure about what they need to do to protect their health and that of people around them. With growing digitization – an expansion of social media and internet use – information can spread more rapidly. This can help to more quickly fill information voids but can also amplify harmful messages." (WHO website).

This is why like in several other fields, fact-checking exercises should be undertaken to sift through false and misleading information which occur on many occasions.

Sources can be anything those led by the doctor himself or herself, health workers like nurses, pharmacy professionals, extension workers etc. There is this special group called 'Accredited Social Health Activists' (ASHA workers) which is a major component of the National Rural Health Mission and still continuing. A woman is selected from a particular village to act as an interface between the village folk and the public health system for better dissemination of health information and contact whenever needed by the villagers. These workers are provided necessary training from time-to-time for keeping in touch with latest developments in this field and thereby extend the benefits to the targeted audience. So far, it has been proving to be a highly-reliable and effective source of information for the rural population.

Besides, there are many advertisements, awareness camps, health camps, public relations exercises etc. carried out by government and non-governmental sectors at various points for making people aware of different schemes of the government.

14.6.1 Health literacy

This is an interesting concept in connection with our area of study. That is, the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention of the USA defines 'Personal health literacy as the degree to which individuals possess the ability to find, understand and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others. Besides, organizational health literacy means the degree to which organizations equitably enable individuals to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others.

Health literacy has also assumed a major importance because of the express need for knowing implications of different issues arising in the field of health and well-being in the society at present. Possessing this kind of literacy, any person can become aware as well as an active practitioner of positive health practices so that ill effects of a fast, modern life may not affect him or her to a big extent. In other words, it should be beneficial for facilitating a person to lead a balanced life in the present day world.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.7 : Discuss delivery of health care in the country.

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Q.8 : How could you spot sources of news in this field ?

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Q.9 : Describe Health literacy.

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14.7 A BRIEF HISTORY OF PHYSICIAN-PATIENT COMMUNICATION

Two scholars in this field – Kaba, R and Sooriakumaran P. (2007) in their research paper (2005) quotes Mead and Bower (2000) who advocated use of a democratic, equal doctor-patient relationship. It differed primarily from the paternalistic focus envisaged by Parsons in 1951. The article informs that the society advocated a shift in the doctor-patient relationship from the 'guidance-co-operation' model to 'mutual participation'. This relationship has undergone major changes over the centuries and decades till date with evolving dimensions and aspects. In short it needs to be said that unless there is a cordial, effective and meaningful relationship between the two sides, a good communication flow can't take place. This shall lead to a situation when the health problem of the patient may not be cured properly as there remained a gap in the communication. The Graduate Medical Guidelines (2018) of NMC also provide for a lot of significance on the physician-patient communication as this is a vital element for a proper diagnosis and cure of the health issues across all societies. Research studies have been conducted from time-to-time in this regard for allowing an adequate direction with a futuristic view for physicians as well as other health workers.

14.8 COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF NRHM

According to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MHFW), Government of India, National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) was launched in April 2005, to provide accessible, affordable and quality health care to the rural population, especially the vulnerable groups. However, the government by a decision in May, 2013 approved launching of National Urban Health Mission (NUHM) as a sub-mission of an over-arching National Health Mission (NHM), with National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) being the other sub-mission.

Hence, it would be wiser to discuss about the overall communication policies of the umbrella body – NHM as it would cover the publicity aspects of both the sub missions. This agency puts a lot of emphasis upon the communication aspect as it is a vitally-important link in the success of the programme in the short and also long run. Every district under this scheme has Media Executives looking after adequate implementation of publicity campaigns for creating awareness about the schemes, precautions etc. Also, a state-level Media Executive oversees a coordinated functioning of the district level activities. We have already mentioned about ASHA

workers who are a major component of this scheme of NHM. The agency as a whole puts a lot of emphasis upon Social and Behaviour Change Communication for achieving its target of inculcating awareness on the various health schemes for the people.

14.9 INTERPERSONAL DIMENSIONS OF HEALTH COMMUNICATION

As the term itself reflects Interpersonal communication is between two persons in an ideal situation for so many purposes under the Earth. Similarly, in health communication parlance also, it is the communication between two primary parties – a doctor and a patient who needs to consult the former for any discomfort out of health factors. Here, empathy is of utmost importance between the two. More so, in the part of the physician as he or she would require to understand and realize what the patient wants to communicate. Based on better understanding of the patient's issues, the doctor shall be able to diagnose the disease properly and prescribe medication for recovery. Chichirez and Purcarea (2008) in their paper 'Doctor-patient communication: a historical overview' in the Journal of Medicine and Life says that it should be considered that medical system communication takes place in an environment that is complex, where favourable and adverse factors coexist and continuously exchange places and importance. Both verbal and non-verbal communication modes are utilized to conduct Interpersonal communication. However, verbal – that is spoken language between the two engaging parties is most convenient and effective as there is the least possibility of misunderstanding or noises causing wrong interpretation of the dialogue process. Like it happens in other areas also, at the initial stages of the communication process, the patient and doctor or other health workers and facilitators need to establish a certain bond between them. This shall bring trust in a gradual manner. Such a process is expected to lead towards a relationship which would cause the patient to gain confidence on the service providers led by the doctor and nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapist (as and when necessary). We have mentioned earlier that unless there is a sense of trust between the two engaging sides, there won't be success in the patients getting cured or their recovery.

The possibility of the aspect of noise or barrier coming up in this communication is of a high scale. This is because like other areas of science communication, many a times the physician or doctor may find it rather difficult to make the patient understand various nitty gritty of abiding by the medication rules and practices or exercises. It may be because of the gap of education and experience between the two. Further, the patient may also find it difficult to

understand what the doctor or nurse may have to say to him about medication. Besides, no person in the world would like to hear a negative news about his or her disease however serious or otherwise it might be. So, if a patient comes to the doctor with a disease which is in a 'terminal' stage, a lot depends on the latter about how to reveal such a difficult news to the person. Hence, these few along with so many different scenarios may arise in the relationship between a doctor and patient that training of proper communication skills is a 'must' for all personnel having a professional career in this profession.

At this point, this needs to be mentioned that along with guidelines for community treatment of some health aspects, individual persons also need to be communicated or guided properly about various bottlenecks which arise during the course of this interpersonal relationship.

14.10 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

To understand the meaning of this term let us visit the WHO website which says that healthier environments could prevent almost one quarter of the global burden of diseases. The COVID-19 pandemic is a further reminder of the delicate relationship between people and our planet. Also, clean air, stable climate, adequate water, sanitation and hygiene, safe use of chemicals, protection from radiation, healthy and safe workplaces, sound agricultural practices, health-supportive cities and built environments, and a preserved nature are all prerequisites for good health.

Thus, it is obvious that a healthy environment is a basic precondition for a healthy living. This has prompted our Prime Minister Narendra Modi also to launch the much-ambitious 'Swachch Bharat' campaign in 2014 for a 'clean India' in the near future. This is a vast field with so many issues ranging from maintaining a green environment, adequate forest cover, minimizing the human-environment conflict in the face of modern day development etc. Let us mention about a few initiatives by some visionary personalities in this direction. It was Rachel Carson, a US scientist who is one of the pioneers in taking a lot of efforts in making people aware of the impending disaster expected to emerge from endangering Nature's way. She started with use of pesticides and unnatural processes for growing more food and increase productivity in many areas at the cost of major damages to the environment. Her first book *Silent Spring* in 1962 paved the way for worldwide discussions in this regard.

Taking a cue from such developments, the UNO held its first ever Conference on Environment in 1972 which led to the adoption of the Stockholm Declaration and Action Plan. It was

followed by a major global conference in 1992 in Rio De Janeiro of Brazil which followed up many of the issues. This was followed by the Climate Change Conference popularly known as COP that is held regularly in different countries for detailed discussions and possible actions to be taken up in this direction.

There have been several prominent personalities who have dedicated their lives for this cause and succeeded in creating awareness at a high level among the population. Mention can be made of Chico Mendes of Brazilian rain forests, Sunderlal Bahuguan of Uttarakhand who spearheaded the Chipko Movement against rampant felling of trees, Medha Patkar fighting against big dams among others. And then there is Jadav Payeng of Assam (Jorhat) who singlehandedly set up and nurtured a full-grown forest on the outskirts of Jorhat town in a span of about three decades. This is an astonishing achievement as he had started from scratch as this area was a fully barren place on the bank of Brahmaputra river. Now he has been recognized globally for his success. Of course, we need to know about these warriors and their struggle to deliver the goods. Again, it is Greta Thunberg (Greta Tintin Eleonora Ernman Thunberg), a young girl-cum-Swedish environmental activist who worked to address the problem of climate change, founding (2018) a movement known as Fridays for Future (also called School Strike for Climate). {Encyclopaedia Britannica}.

Along with inculcation of awareness about many other areas under the bigger domain of science communication, specially Health Communication, Environmental Health also assumes a major position in the overall area. Climate change, minimization of damage against Nature, and also damage-control, reduction in carbon footprints etc. all these issues are being taken up and potential solutions are expected to be arrived at in the coming days.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.10 : What role does Interpersonal communication play in health communication ?

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Q.11 : What kind of media strategies are utilized by NHM for this purpose ?

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Q.12 : What do you understand by the term Environmental Health ?

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14.11 ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATION

Already we have discussed the issue of health communication. In the science communication discipline, environmental communication is an important area of discussion. You know that now the all the people in the world are taking environmental issues with due seriousness. Various meetings, conferences, etc are being organised nationally and internationally. The 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference, commonly known as the Copenhagen Summit, was held at the Bella Center in Copenhagen, Denmark, between 7 December and 18 December. The conference included the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 5th Meeting of the Parties (COP/MOP 5) to the Kyoto Protocol. So, environmental communication has become an important part of the science communication discipline.

14.11.1 Meaning and Definition

Environmental communication, popularly known as EnvCom refers to the study and practice of how individuals, institutions, societies, and cultures craft, distribute, receive, understand, and use messages about the environment and human interactions with the environment. This includes a wide range of possible interactions, from interpersonal communication to virtual communities, participatory decision making, and environmental media coverage. Environmental communication as an academic field emerged from interdisciplinary work involving communication, environmental studies, environmental science, risk analysis and management, sociology, and political ecology.

The Development Assistance Committee's Working Party on Development Cooperation and Environment established an Interest Group on Environmental Communication in 1997 to work on the issues of environmental communication. According to this committee, Environmental Communication is the planned and strategic use of communication processes and media products to support effective policy making, public participation and project implementation geared towards environmental sustainability. Embedded in a well-defined communication strategy, EnvCom makes efficient use of methods, instruments and techniques which are well established in development communication, adult education, social marketing,

agricultural extension, public relations, non-formal training and other fields. In his book *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*, Robert Cox provides a more formal definition that situates environmental communication as a form of symbolic action. In Cox's words, Environmental Communication is "the pragmatic and constitutive vehicle for our understanding of the environment as well as our relationships to the natural world; it is the symbolic medium that we use in constructing environmental problems and negotiating society's different responses to them." By word 'pragmatic' Cox means the instrumental function of educating, alerting, persuading, mobilizing, solving, etc. By the word 'constitutive' he means the creative function of helping to shape our perceptions of nature, environmental issues and ourselves.

While writing the meaning of the environmental communication for the Environmental Communication Network, Mark Meisner simply defines that environmental communication is communication about environmental affairs. As with other forms of communication, environmental communication is both an activity/phenomenon and a field of study that, not surprisingly, studies the activity/phenomenon.

He says that as an activity/phenomenon, environmental communication is all of the diverse forms of interpersonal, group, public, organizational, and mass communication that make up the social discussion/debate about environmental issues and problems, and our relationship to non-human nature. Loosely speaking, we can refer to that discussion/debate about environmental issues and problems as "environmental discourse." And, we can refer to the even broader social discussion about Nature as the discourse of Nature. Environmental communication manifests as the discourse of Nature and its subset, the environmental discourse. As a field of study, environmental communication is a diverse synthesis of communication and environmental theory that examines the role, techniques, and influence of communication in environmental affairs.

Environmental communication is a type of symbolic action that serves two functions. These functions are pragmatic and constitutive. Environmental communication is pragmatic because it helps individuals and organizations to accomplish goals and literally do things through communication. Examples of this include educating, alerting, persuading and collaborating.

Environmental communication is constitutive because it helps to shape people's understandings of environmental issues, themselves, and Nature; it shapes the meanings we hold of these things. Examples of this include values, attitudes, and ideologies vis-à-vis Nature and environmental issues and problems.

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14.11.2 Areas of Environmental Communication

In the book *'Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere',* Robert Cox mentioned that the field of environmental communication is composed of seven major areas of study and practice. These are:

1. Environmental rhetoric and discourse
2. Media and environmental journalism
3. Public participation in environmental decision making
4. Social marketing and Advocacy campaigns
5. Environmental collaboration and conflict resolution
6. Risk communication
7. Representations of Nature in popular culture and green marketing

These seven are the main areas of study in the field of environmental communication as opined by Prof. Cox. Dietz and Stern state that as found in a study of the National Research Council, founded that "when done well, public participation improves the quality and legitimacy of a decision …. Can lead to better results in terms of environmental quality". Therefore, while popularising the environmental issues public participation helps in formulating good decisions.

Social marketing can be applied to promote merit goods, or to make a society avoid demerit goods and thus it promotes society's well being as a whole. For example, this may include asking people not to smoke in public areas, asking them to use seat belts, or prompting them to observe speed limits. Prof. Cox says that scholars have used a range of approaches in the study of public education and advocacy campaigns. It is a rapidly growing area of study. Public education and advocacy campaign attempt to change the public behaviour to achieve an environmental goal.

Another important area is environmental journalism. Environmental journalism is the collection, verification, production, distribution and exhibition of information regarding current events, trends, issues and people that are associated with the non-human world with which humans necessarily interact. To be an environmental journalist, one must have an understanding of scientific language and practice, knowledge of historical environmental events, the ability to keep abreast environmental policy decisions and the work of environmental organizations, a general understanding of current environmental concerns, and the ability to communicate that information to the public in such a way that it can be easily understood, despite its complexity. Environmental Journalism focuses on the ways in which the news, advertising, commercial programmes and internet sites portray nature and environmental problems. It is also a study of the effect of the media on public attitude.

14.11.3 Some important environmental issues

Here is a list of environmental issues which relate to the anthropogenic effects on natural environment. Learners can study these issues and write on them in newspapers and magazines in a lucid manner inorder to enable the lay readers to understand these issues.

- **Anoxic waters** — Anoxic event • Hypoxia • Ocean deoxygenation • Dead zone
- **Carbon Credit**
- **Climate change** — Global warming • Global dimming • Fossil fuels • Sea level rise • Greenhouse gas • Ocean acidification • Shutdown of thermohaline circulation
- **Conservation** — Species extinction • Pollinator decline • Coral bleaching • Holocene extinction • Invasive species • Poaching • Endangered species
- **Energy** — Energy conservation • Renewable energy • Efficient energy use • Renewable energy commercialization
- **Environmental degradation** — Eutrophication • Habitat destruction • Invasive species

- **Environmental health** — Air quality • Asthma • Electromagnetic fields • Electromagnetic radiation and health • Indoor air quality • Lead poisoning • Sick Building Syndrome
- **Genetic engineering** — Genetic pollution • Genetically modified food controversies
- Global Warming
- **Intensive farming** — Overgrazing • Irrigation • Monoculture • Environmental effects of meat production • Slash and burn • Pesticide drift • Plasticulture
- **Land degradation** — Land pollution • Desertification
- **Soil** — Soil conservation • Soil erosion • Soil contamination • Soil salination
- **Land use** — Urban sprawl • Habitat fragmentation • Habitat destruction
- **Nanotechnology** — Nanotoxicology • Nanopollution
- **Nuclear issues** — Nuclear fallout • Nuclear meltdown • Nuclear power • Nuclear weapons • Nuclear and radiation accidents • Nuclear safety • High-level radioactive waste management.
- **Overpopulation** — Burial • Water crisis • Overpopulation in companion animals • Tragedy of the commons
- **Ozone depletion** — CFC
- **Pollution** — Light pollution • Noise pollution • Visual pollution • Nonpoint source pollution • Point source pollution
- **Water pollution** — Acid rain • Eutrophication • Marine pollution • Ocean dumping • Oil spills • Thermal pollution • Urban runoff • Water crisis • Marine debris • Ocean acidification • Ship pollution •Wastewater • Fish kill • Algal bloom • Mercury in fish
- **Air pollution** — Smog • Tropospheric ozone • Indoor air quality • Volatile organic compound • Particulate matter • Sulphur oxide
- **Reservoirs** — Environmental impacts of reservoirs
- **Resource depletion** — Exploitation of natural resources • Overdrafting
- **Consumerism** — Consumer capitalism • Planned obsolescence • Over-consumption
- **Fishing** — Blast fishing • Bottom trawling • Cyanide fishing • Ghost nets • Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing • Overfishing • Shark finning • Whaling
- **Logging** — Clearcutting • Deforestation • Illegal logging
- **Mining** — Acid mine drainage • Mountaintop removal mining • Slurry impoundments

- **Toxins** — Chlorofluorocarbons • DDT • Endocrine disruptors • Dioxin • Toxic heavy metals • Herbicides • Pesticides • Toxic waste • PCB • Bioaccumulation • Biomagnifications

- **Waste** — E-waste • Litter • Waste disposal incidents • Marine debris • Medical waste • Landfill • Leachate • Recycling • Incineration • Great Pacific Garbage Patch

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14.12 LET US SUM UP

- Health communication is a type of communication which is dedicated towards dissemination of health-related information to masses at all levels of the society
- It can happen at two broader levels – micro and macro – at individual or family level and at society or community level
- This is a complicated communication system as there are lot of issues involved in it between health workers and patients
- Because of its significance the National Medical Graduates Guidelines 2018 of the National Medical Council (NMC) has listed communication as an essential skill to be taught and developed to medical graduates for a better communication with patients and others concerned alike

- Realizing the significance of a proper communication system, the World Health Organization (WHO) has devised quite a few modules and guidelines for an effective implementation of health communication.
- As a part of this initiative, a system called Communication for Health (C4H) has been developed which entails detailed advisories about carrying out communication for health purposes in all areas of the world whenever necessary
- WHO has also devised a set of six-point principles for acquiring success in this direction which takes care of all possible scenarios involved with the process
- In case of medicine for various diseases, there are broadly two categories – generic medicine and those with a brand name
- Generic ones are usually less costly with all necessary ingradients intact whereas branded ones with same or similar components are costlier. Hence thee is a need for making people literate of this aspect so that they don't pay more for the same product with a different or less popular name.
- Delivery of healthcare to the targeted people has been a challenge in the country even now with many bottlenecks of different kinds causing difficulty in the process
- More streamlining of processes of delivery and feedback assessment are the need of the hour in this regard
- Sources of news for health and medicinal issues may be manifold. While the health workers led by the doctors, nurses etc. are important sources, other mass media and publicity modes about these are also equally important for reaching out to the public.
- Health literacy is an emerging field within the overall domain of health communication. It means basic awareness about health-related issues so that one can enjoy a balanced and healthy lifestyle amidst the growing situation of stress in almost all sectors of the society.
- A considerably-significant portion of health communication is centred around an interpersonal relationship, led by the one between the patient and the physician. Hence, the theoretical as well as practical aspects of interpersonal communication with absence of any possible noise or barrier is a primary necessity for a successful communication between these two parties. Hence, efforts must be kept on for always trying to improvise it to the maximum possible extent.
- This relationship also includes that one between other health workers apart from the doctor – nurses, pharmacists etc.
- There has been research studies going on at academic and scholarly circles for finding out ways and means for improving it to an ideal status.

- The National Health Mission (NHM) along with its two sub units have been utilizing various media and publicity tools for inculcating peoples' awareness about different health and related issues all over the society. Social Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) is particularly one of their efforts.
- Environmental Health is becoming more and more important over the decades because of its primary mandate of creating awareness among the people about keeping the environment in a healthy status. The goal is that a considerable portion of health-related problems can be mitigated even without going for medical advise at all.
- Several prominent personalities have initiated a dedicated crusade in their lives for developing awareness about this issue among human beings across the world.
- Environmental communication, popularly known as EnvCom refers to the study and practice of how individuals, institutions, societies, and cultures craft, distribute, receive, understand, and use messages about the environment and human interactions with the environment.
    - Environmental communication serves two functions- pragmatic and constitutive.
    - Environmental communication is pragmatic because it helps individuals and organizations to accomplish goals and literally do things through communication. Environmental communication is constitutive because it helps to shape people's understandings of environmental issues, themselves, and Nature; it shapes the meanings we hold of these things.
    - · Environmental journalism is the collection, verification, production, distribution and exhibition of information regarding current events, trends, issues and people that are associated with the non-human world with which humans necessarily interact.

14.13 FURTHER READING

1) Bucchi, Massimiano & Brian Trench (2008), *Handbook of Public Communication of Science and Technology,* Routledge

2) Nanda, J.N (2004), *Science and Technology in India's Transformation*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi

Important websites :

Website of World Health Organization

Website of Society for Health Communication

https://publichealth.tulane.edu/blog/health-communication-effective-strategies/

https://www.fda.gov/drugs/buying-using-medicine-safely/generic-drugs

https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/generic-drugs-can-be-cheaper-so-ask-your-doctor-about-them/2011/07/07/gIQAt2WL9H_story.html

https://www.businessworld.in/article/Challenges-faced-by-the-Indian-healthcare-system/21-08-2020-311268/

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/6420507_The_evolution_of_the_doctor-patient_relationship

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https://www.who.int/westernpacific/activities/Communicating-for-health-impact

https://publichealth.tulane.edu/blog/health-communication-effective-strategies/

https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/why-health-communication-is-important/article4268023.ece

14.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1 : Health communication is the activity that is undertaken for disseminating and expanding all relevant and adequate messages about various issues in the field of health. The primary objective of this communication is to inculcate awareness about health and related problems among the people so that the latter can live a healthy life. This is becoming even more important as a sea of information of all kinds is in circulation. But, the relevant and required information needs to be disseminated properly to the people.

Ans to Q No 2 : These guidelines are more of a preventive nature as prevention is always better than the cure. For example, during COVID-19 pandemic, people had to wear masks, maintain social distance and use hand sanitisers in addition to other restrictions. Also, in times of summer rains, precautions were supposed to be taken seriously for avoiding water and air borne diseases like encephalitis, malaria etc. The major purpose of these guidelines are to prevent possible occurrence of any disease or health-related abnormality in a person.

Ans to Q No 3 : This is an interesting and important area of medical sciences where the entire community is targeted for treatment through different medical diagnosis so that the society as a whole may remain free from many health problems. For example, if the entire community in a village or a town area maintain proper civic hygiene, there is very less possibility of breaking out of any communicable disease. And, if the community as a whole maintain such standards it becomes far more easier to prevent many diseases. Hence, in many medical education institutions, there is a separate department for this aspect.

Ans to Q No 4 : As the name itself suggests, it is the global body of nations formed for unitedly taking care of major issues in the health and wellness sector across the world. It can be said that like UNO, this is a specialized agency in the domain of health. It monitors all kinds of health issues. Especially those with a worldwide implication and execute the same taking into confidence all member nations for an inclusive and expanded outreach to the maximum number of individuals and communities. It coordinates such activities among the member states for a better and healthy planet earth.

Ans to Q No 5 : This is one of the pioneering ideas with far-reaching potential impacts in this direction conceptualized by WHO. The primary objective is to utilize the advantages of the domain of communication for addressing all relevant aspects in connection with fighting health problems around the world. A major focus of it is - inculcating a sense of awareness for prevention of disease. It is based on the idea that communication leads to awareness and thereby empowerment on preventive measures about any disease and health issue.

Ans to Q No 6 : Issues related to the field of medicine may be like ---

- Lack of awareness among people about the differences between generic and brand name medicine which leads to spending a lot of money without any justification.
- Need for awareness creation about the scale of side effects of a medicine used for any disease.
- Awareness about different names of a basic medicine manufactured by various companies.
- Awareness about not consuming medicine without a proper advice from a registered medical practitioner etc.

Ans to Q No 7 : Delivery of health care in the country is still not in an ideal condition. This is because of many factors. Such as, because of population explosion all health facilities set up by the government and also the private sector establishments are unable to keep pace with the real time demand. Also, as there is a lack of basic infrastructure even now in many of the remote and rural areas, a good portion of health workers led by doctors, nurses etc. are reluctant to work in those areas. Thus, many such places have to live without adequate medical professionals and facilities. Also, there is a lack of interest in adopting modern thoughts and accepting scientific developments among people even today. This leads to problems like child marriage, unhealthy lifestyle, least regard to a balanced diet among others. The gaps in health care delivery are responsible in many ways for such a scenario.

Ans to Q No 8 : Any person, system, establishment from which there is a potential for a news on health-related issues is a source of news in this direction. It may be the awareness creation articles, features, advertisements in the media, academic research-based journals (not quite easy to understand for the common man), magazines, audio-visual programmes etc. for creation of such awareness are important sources. There is a need for establishing the authenticity of such news items prior to using them. This is because nowadays a whole lot of news items are found to be fake. The medical professionals right from the doctor to nurses, pharmacists and others are also sources of news on health issues.

Ans to Q No 9 : This is a simple concept which implies a comprehensive literacy about health issues by which we can lead a healthy life. In other words it is awareness about various measures for prevention of disease, knowledge about how to fight against an ailment, consulting doctor in the concerned field so that diagnosis can be speedy and a better recovery from such situation. This kind of literacy can be acquired by consulting doctors, medical professionals, popular literature about health issues. For example, a few years back, quite a few minor children lost their lives after consumption of lichis in its season. Later on, it was found that if this fruit was consumed in more numbers in an empty stomach in the early hours of the day it could lead to a very damaging situation which usually proves fatal for such minor children if immediate medical care is not given. Similarly, avoiding too much of packet food, fast food, spicy ones, alcoholic and tobacco products are just a minuscule examples of health literacy in a simple way.

Ans to Q No 10 : Interpersonal communication can be considered as the mainstay of health communication. This is because a person-to-person communication is the best form of communication for a successful exchange of information and messages between the doctor and patient and also nurses, pharmacists etc. There is a need for complete absence or a minimum of noise or barrier in this communication so that no confusion can arise in the situation. Otherwise it may lead to an unsuccessful communication effort thereby resulting in delayed or no recovery from the disease or ailments by the patient at all. Not only between the patient and doctor, the same is so important even for communication between doctor-nurse, pharmacists, other care givers so that no misunderstanding can take place in this relationship. Hence, interpersonal communication enjoys such a sacrosanct place in this regard.

Ans to Q No 11 : NHM on its part employs all feasible and effective media for taking its messages to the maximum possible number of people in the society. Media is a progressive and dynamic term which evolves with the passage of time. Hence, any organization with a mandate to reach out to the people need to keep a track of all new developments in this direction. Also adopt all of them for achieving the target of being able to address all members of the population. Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) is a major component of NHM's media practices as it tries to inculcate change of behaviour of the people towards a positive and healthy one rather than a less-progressive one. It has become necessary as majority of the people find it highly difficult to change their age-old temperament towards a modern and progressive one despite even possessing academic and other kinds of literacy.

Ans to Q No 12 : Environmental health is the good health of the environment which is like our mother and nurtures us with all its might. Quite a few pioneering individuals and institutions over the last several decades have dedicated their lives for creating awareness about this issue so that the global population can live in a healthy atmosphere. It is nowadays a common saying that there is only one planet Earth which needs to be nurtured properly for preventing its man-made decay far ahead than its natural one. That is, preventing as well as finding out solutions for fulfilling the requirements of the people which is increasing in a geometric proportion whereas resources are still in arithmetic proportion. Rachel Carson, Sunderlal Bahuguna, Medha Patkar, Jadav Payeng and this very young ambassador of environmental health Greta Thunberg have demonstrated to the world the need for taking this cause in a serious manner for keeping the world intact in this direction.

14.13 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

A. Short Questions (answer in around 150 words)

Q.1 : What does community medicine deal with?

Q.2 : What do you mean by health literacy?

Q.3 : What are the different areas of environmental communication?

B. Long Questions (answer in around 300-500 words)

Q.1 : What do you understand by the term health Communication ? How is it related to science communication ?

Q.2 : What are the general guidelines for health communication ? How were these guidelines formed over the years ?

Q.3 : Discuss the important aspects in terms of use of medicine in the field of health communication. How can these be turned towards an advantage ?

Q.4 : Briefly write about the issues and prospects in connection to delivery of health care in the society ? How can communication be of some support in this regard ?

Q.5 : Why is the relationship and communication between patient and a doctor or a health worker is considered so important ? How can this be improved for future purposes ?

Q.6 : Write briefly about the history of the physician-patient communication till preset day. How can we make it a better one in future ?

Q.7: Identify the sources of news and information for various health-related aspects and elaborate on their advantages and disadvantages, if any.

Q.8: What is your understanding of the term ‘environmental health’ ? Discuss it in the light of today’s global situation.