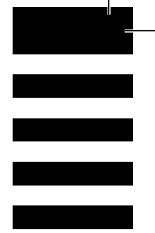


Health Communication



Health practices in the Philippines have a peculiar characteristic: the widespread use of traditional and alternative medicine side by side with allopathic or western medicine. Both traditional and alternative healers define health in terms of four core concepts: *isip* (mind), *damdamin* (emotions/feelings), *ispirituwal* (spiritual body), and *materyal* (physical body). While these concepts are distinct from one another, the healers recognize their interrelatedness and use healing modalities that address all “bodies” of a person.

The continued patronage of traditional medicine and the growing interest in alternative medicine are often attributed to the high cost of medical care and the inaccessibility of health centers and the lack of doctors and nurses, particularly in the rural areas, and the limitations of science as far as treatments of difficult or terminal cases are concerned. Healers, too, are considered to be better communicators, explaining in the language the patients understand, the nature and causes of their illnesses, advising and assuring them that they will get well. They are also a natural recourse for complaints which are believed to be of non-physical cause or believed to have been inflicted by preternatural and supernatural entities, since their healing beliefs and practices include such entities.

Promotive, preventive and curative health care cannot be effectively carried out without considering the cultural context and media role's which are pivotal

in all of these. In the last few decades, both traditional and new media have been used for campaigns to educate the general public as well as segmented audiences, change their attitudes and behavior, and advertise products that claim to improve health and wellbeing.

Communication processes play an important part in shaping people's health, through their influence on attitudes, choices, preferences, and behaviors. The papers that appear in this issue of *Plaridel* seek to contribute to the local literature in health communication by either testing western ideas in the local context, or generating new knowledge about the cultural dimensions of health and medicine communication in the country.

Jabal and Paradina's paper sheds light on perceived competencies in parent-child communication, with a focus on interpersonal discussions about risky health behaviors. They use data from a 2007 survey by the UP College of Mass Communication's Department of Communication Research which had sought to study Filipino communication competencies regarding a wide variety of topics. Jabal and Paradina focus on the self-rating of parents with regards to their competency in discussing with their children the problems of smoking, drugs, alcohol and sex as health risk behaviors. Also on the interpersonal level of communication, David and Atun, in "Exploring the Relationship between Interpersonal Communication and Use of Modern Method Family Planning in the Philippines," analyze patterns of interpersonal communication and situational factors in relation to family planning and contraceptive use.

"Communicating Healthy Lifestyle Choices in Primetime TV Advertisements" by Corullo et al. discusses the portrayals and messages in TV advertisements on healthy lifestyle and explores how these influence viewers' knowledge, attitudes and behaviors regarding healthy lifestyles. On the other hand, Flores' "Of Hearts and Minds: Filipino Adult Viewers' Message Interpretation Processing of Vaccination-Related Public Service Announcement" delves into the factors that influence the patients' interpretation process of public service announcements on rabies, polio and measles which the walk-in patients viewed in three barangay health centers in Parañaque City.

"The (*Mistica*) Doctor Is In: Communicating Health at Suprema dela Iglesia del Ciudad Mistica de Dios" by Jabal et al. gives a glimpse of how science and religion complement each other in a community at the foot of Mt. Banahaw, and how the sect through its healers, communicate health and health risk behaviors.

Dr. Jaime Galvez-Tan, in Zamora's interview with him, shares his wealth of experience in community health and health programs, reveals how and why he integrates North American and Asian traditional medicine in his practice, and how he views cultural health practices and the role of media in health education.

Also in this issue are Montemayor's review of Charlie Beckett's *Networked Journalism: How to Save Journalism So It Can Save the World*, a book on how present day journalists are coping with the many changes that affect mainstream journalism; Flores' review of two digital films by award-winning director Brillante Mendoza – *Serbis* and *Foster Child*; and the Filmography of Filipino Films for 2008.

Papers in this issue show that demographic characteristics are not adequate in health communication planning and the implementation of health programs. Of prime importance is the cultural milieu of the beneficiary-audiences within which such programs and projects are implemented. It is hoped that the insights provided by the articles would help not only health communicators and policymakers but also individuals whose ultimate goal is to provide and live quality lives.


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