

MEN'S CONTINENCE HEALTH – LET'S TALK ABOUT IT!

Hypothesis / aims of study

A national men's health organisation was funded to design, initiate, implement and manage the National Men's Health Ambassador Speaker Program in Australia. The program was designed to conduct a series of national men's continence awareness-raising presentations over a two year period. The aims of the program included raising the awareness of bladder health, bowel health and prostate health in men, the promotion of help-seeking strategies for men, introducing health promotion strategies and health professionals (continence nurse advisors and continence physiotherapists). A key ingredient to this model was the development of community partnerships, which will be shown, created a natural conduit to successfully raising awareness of continence health and prostate health. This paper will provide data and information on the National Men's Health Ambassador Speaker Program from 1 July 2008 to 31 December 2009 (i.e. for 18 months of the two year project).

Study design, materials and methods

Volunteer Ambassadors were recruited nationally and trained in executive public speaking skills to equip them to deliver a standard presentation covering continence health and prostate health. An unexpected finding was the enormous interest in becoming a National Men's Health Ambassador Speaker. Overall a total of number 116 Ambassador Speakers were recruited and trained and 105 were retained, this exceeded the requirements by 36, or 45%. As at 31 December 2009 there was also an unsolicited waiting list of 120 people who have expressed interest in joining the National Men's Health Ambassador Speaker Program across Australia.

Results

The total of 928 presentations to 29,814 audience members in fifteen months were conducted across Australia to mostly male audiences (>78.7% male) and in a variety of settings including corporations, industry and other workplaces, sporting groups, community groups and associations. Underpinning this success were strategies of targeted volunteer recruitment; appropriate training including marketing skills and on-going support which included using a range of communication tools instigated by the Ambassador Management Team. The volunteer retention rate of 90.5% is in part testament to the strength of the relationship between the volunteers and the Ambassador Management Team.

Training has been conducted in remote Australia for Torres Strait Islander men and Aboriginal men who had expressed interest after hearing about the program or attending an Ambassador Presentation. They communicated that the knowledge, awareness and information on continence health and prostate health was needed in their communities. This has been an unexpected outcome of the National Men's Health Ambassador Speaker Program.

External independent evaluation consultants appointed to the National Men's Health Ambassador Speaker Program have provided the appropriate data and results. The key purpose of the project evaluation was to provide evidence that can be used to inform future policy in respect of the success of the National Men's Health Ambassador Speaker Program and its effectiveness in meeting the National Continence Management Strategy objectives. Evaluation data has been obtained through a variety of methods including generic surveys, telephone surveys, focus groups and post presentation audience member appraisals, organisational representative appraisals and ambassador speaker self appraisals. The return rate of appraisals 29.1%, 66.5% and 67.7% respectively is considered by the evaluation consultant as very good. Formalised quantitative approaches have been used to assess the quality and effectiveness of the National Men's Health Ambassador Speaker Training Program and all community presentations.

The media, newspapers, radio and TV has been particularly interested in the National Men's Health Ambassador Speaker Program and the measured reach has been 300,000 people nationally to 31 December 2009.

Interpretation of results

The objectives of the National Men's Health Ambassador Speaker Program have been evaluated and align with and contribute to, the aims and objectives of the National Continence Management Strategy. There is evidence that the program has contributed to a broader awareness of continence health in Australian men. Evaluation responses from audience members and organisational representatives indicated that aspects of both 'continence health' (over 60%) and 'prostate health' (over 90%) were most useful. Evaluation of the program has found that governance arrangements were sufficient for monitoring the National Men's Health Ambassador Speaker Program and reporting to Board level and the funding body. Evidence that the Ambassador Management Team arrangements contributed to effective implementation and operation of the program are seen in the overall achievement of the activity targets. The program has exceeded the overall activity target of 19,200 audience members by 55%, with reach to 29,814 audience members between 1 October 2008 and 31 December 2009. With a further six months to run till 30 June 2010, the program will meet and exceed the activity target of 960 presentation numbers, having already reached 96.7% of target (928 presentations) as at 31 December 2009.

The National Men's Health Ambassador Speaker Program has achieved considerable success in reaching men in non-metropolitan areas. The audience member numbers per geographic location reported by ambassador speaker's appraisals were compared to national estimates of the male population aged 20 to 70 years, as an estimated target population by geographic location. Evaluation data suggests that the National Men's Health Ambassador Speaker Program has reached a higher proportion of the target population in rural areas of Australia (average 0.8%), regional areas (average 0.6%) and remote areas (average 0.4%) than metropolitan areas (average 0.1%). Significant continence health and prostate health resource materials have also been distributed to the community by way of the National Men's Health Ambassador Speaker Program as of 31 December 2009, a total of 515,708 information resources had been provided to audience members.

The majority of organisational representatives felt that the overall understanding of the group (audience) was 'very good' or 'excellent' (83.1%). The majority of audience members found the presentation to be 'very' or 'extremely useful' (87.6%). The majority of ambassador speakers also felt that the effectiveness of the presentation was 'very good' or 'excellent' (78.8%). The presentations were shown to be effective in eliciting a call-to-action with audience members indicating that they would: consult

a doctor, health professional or health service (41.1%); use the information for future use as needed (31.3%); or pass information on to family or friends (25.2%). This provides evidence that the program has raised awareness and knowledge of continence health and prostate health in Australian men and resulted in a change in behaviour.

Data from the National Continence Helpline measured an increase in male callers of 21.1% from 1 October 2008 to 31 December 2009, compared to the same period 2007 to 2008. This result includes both men in the general public and male health professionals. The data may, in the future, support claims of the effectiveness of the National Men's Health Ambassador Speaker Program in encouraging help-seeking behaviour by men in relation to continence health. The helpline is widely promoted by ambassador speakers during each presentation and in the take-home resource material distributed to each audience member.

Concluding message

The National Men's Health Ambassador Speaker Program has proven to be a successful health promotion model creating awareness of continence health and prostate health which has exceeded many of its targets through innovation and strategic design. An important outcome of the program is that both Aboriginal men and Torres Strait Islander men living in remote Australia expressed interest in the program during the first 12 months and have been trained as ambassador speakers.

The program has realised its aim of contributing to a raised awareness of continence health and prostate health by reaching 29,814 audience members and exceeded activity targets set by the funding body. Using trained volunteer National Men's Health Ambassador Speakers to deliver men's health messages through peer education and awareness-raising has proved to be successful and cost effective, particularly considering the extensive reach achieved in rural, regional and remote Australia. This model is flexible, transportable and economical. There is no doubt that the dedication, commitment and skills of the ambassador speakers themselves were a significant factor in the success of this program.

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| <i>Specify source of funding or grant</i> | The Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia was funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, National Continence Management Strategy - National Men's Continence Awareness Strategy to design, implement and manage the 2008-2010 National Men's Health Ambassador Speaker Program. Ethics approval was not required. |
| <i>Is this a clinical trial?</i> | No |
| <i>What were the subjects in the study?</i> | HUMAN |
| <i>Was this study approved by an ethics committee?</i> | No |
| <i>This study did not require ethics committee approval because</i> | The National Men's Health Ambassador Speaker Program was based on sharing awareness and knowledge of continence health and prostate health in the community via public presentations. Audience members and organisations participating opted in voluntarily by both organising Men's Health Events and attending these events in the community and in workplaces. |
| <i>Was the Declaration of Helsinki followed?</i> | Yes |
| <i>Was informed consent obtained from the patients?</i> | No |