

Health and Edutainment

My name is Ary Silva, I am the video producer for the Pan American Health Organization in Washington DC regional office for the Americas for the World Health.

Today we will talk about the impact and influence of television and radio on behavior related health issues. Soap operas, community radio programs and entertainment TV have the power to mobilize people to take control of their health, both in terms of prevention and treatment.

We want this session to explore ways and exchange ideas in which we – public health specialists – can work together with you – broadcasters – to promote health.

I come from a country that lives by its soap operas. During prime time hours of all major networks, soap operas are broadcasted back to back. People make their life arrangements around soap operas and make appointments, dates, etc. before or after, but never during their favorite soap opera. Through the years, soap operas influenced fashion, hairstyles, language expressions, music, cultural values, and of course health.

An interesting fact happened in 1985 – a famous actor used a wig on a very popular soap opera and the wig market saw a rise of 70% in that year.

The numbers are amazing; many soap operas have already featured health messages that resulted in some kind of behaviour change.

In Brazil, TV Globo producers carried out a study in which they tracked changes in health services during the airing of a soap opera called Blood Ties, whose protagonist, Camila, was diagnosed with leukemia. The study, titled “The Camila Effect”, found that in November 2000, during the show’s early episodes, Brazil’s National Registry of Bone Marrow Donors reported an average of 20 new registrations per month.

In 1986, a character on Venezuela’s soap opera Cristal was diagnosed with breast cancer. This lead to an avalanche of female patients getting check-ups in Venezuela and in Spain, where the series also aired.

For public health advocated, entertainment radio and television are ideal mediums for transmitting positive messages about healthier living. For broadcasters, featuring health themes on their air is a unique opportunity to discuss issues relevant to their audiences and therefore increase ratings.

I can spend this whole morning talking about behavior change success stories through entertainment but I realize that my colleagues here also have important information to share with you, and so I'll pass the baton to them.