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Abstracts

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A Social Marketing Approach in Male Occupational Reproductive Hazards Communication

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Reproductive health information and education for men and women is a basic human right that has been addressed by many organizations from different perspectives ranging from, information disseminating to provision of services. There are few organizations, however, that address occupational reproductive hazards that affect male workers and their families directly or indirectly who come into contact with these hazards on daily basis.

Male workers in metalworking industries (such as the automotive sector and welding), for example, are constantly exposed to metals, gases, and chemicals that have been identified as hazardous to the male reproductive system. Although animal studies indicate that men and women are equally affected by chemicals and other biological hazards, male reproductive health has not received as much attention - especially in terms of communicating information about hazards. Also, men rarely seek information or get routine checkups unless they have experienced illness.

Reproductive health problems resulting from exposure to hazardous substances have included low sperm count, abnormal sperm shape, altered sperm transfer, altered hormones and sexual function, impotence, and various disorders affecting offspring. Toxicants might also affect other phases of the reproductive system including the genetic integrity of the sperm cell, neuroendocrine function, and sexual function. Exposure can occur through inhalation, oral ingestion, or skin contact. Workers may also expose their families when they transport these substances to their automobiles or homes on clothing or work tools.

Scientific research has focused on identifying and examining these hazards; however, little has been done in terms of effective communication about results of these studies and risks workers face. Unfortunately, most scientific research has focused on examining these hazards while little has been done in terms of effective risk communication to the male workers who face the hazards on daily basis. Though identifying these hazards is necessary, it may not be sufficient in preventing the workers from short or long-term reproductive health problems if they do not have access or comprehend the information about the risks involved. Once a study is conducted it is important for researchers to disseminate the results and in a manner that will help the workers effectively use that information to protect themselves and others from occupational reproductive hazards.

In this presentation, we propose use of a social marketing approach for awareness, education and behavior change among male workers in relation to their reproductive health in relation to their health and wellbeing. Social marketing focuses on influencing consumer behavior (worker behavior in this case) by emphasizing the four P's of marketing - product, price, place and promotion. Product is the health information, ideas or practices that have been determined to affect the health of the consumer; price could mean the psychological cost of adopting a



practice or behavior; and place refers to any distribution channels that would reach the intended consume or client; and promotion could range from mass media, billboards, posters, to interpersonal or any other advertising.

Social marketing utilizes existing commercial or communication outlets, relying on the market analytical techniques: market research, product development, pricing accessibility, advertising and promotion. Social marketing encourages changes in behavior, which will benefit society as well as individuals either immediately or over a period of time. The goal should be long-term health benefits rather than the short-term goals in occupational safety and health communication. Market research or evaluation of the health information product is therefore necessary because it provides health communication specialists with tools to prevent potential problems and pitfalls and for understanding out thoughts and attitudes about a given issue that help prevent possible failures and position a health informatin product. This is precisely marketing's main contribution: systematic, research-based information about consumers (workers) that is indispensable for the success of interventions.

This presentation describes a process for (1) developing clear, direct, and appropriate messages for male workers about reproductive hazards, (2) disseminating the message, (3) evaluating worker access to and understanding of this message, and (4) prompting them to seek further information about reproductive hazards. Worker access to and comprehension of the message about risk is essential to preventing short- and long-term reproductive health problems.

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