

## Televised Course Shows Teachers New Ways to Take the Health Message to the Classroom

Through telecommunication and the efforts of a local area health education center (AHEC), Eastern Virginia elementary school teachers are learning new ways to introduce health education in their classrooms.

The teachers learn about nutrition, substance abuse, fitness, dental hygiene, and stress management from a series of programs telecast after school hours to their own or nearby schools by a local microwave television network. The series, called "HEALTHWORKS," is produced by the Peninsula AHEC, one of the centers in the Eastern Virginia AHEC program, which is conducted in cooperation with the Department of Health and Human Services and the Eastern Virginia Medical School.

**How it began.** HEALTHWORKS resulted from a sense of frustration shared by two Eastern Virginia administrators: the director of health and physical education for a local public school system and the local director of the American Lung Association. They were frustrated because excellent teaching materials available on smoking and substance abuse were not being used in the classroom. Efforts to promote the materials and provide them free to local school systems had not increased their use. Apparently, classroom teachers either did not know about the materials or, if they did, were afraid adapting them to specific classroom needs would be too time-consuming.

The administrators conceived the idea of televising a health education course that would demonstrate the materials, emphasizing their ease of use. But there were still major problems to be worked out. How could the televised course be produced? And who would pay for it?

The Peninsula AHEC became involved when these problems were brought to the attention of its director, Dr. Don Combs. He and Dr. Denise DeWald, the AHEC's professional development coordinator, had developed a number of health education programs with the cooperation of public schools, voluntary health associations, and local universities. Dr. Combs and Dr. DeWald agreed that the Peninsula AHEC should make a major commitment of staff time and money to the development of a televised health education course for teachers. They believed that the increased teacher participation resulting from such a course would give



*Dr. Don Combs (on screen) introduces the nutrition segment of HEALTHWORKS to teachers watching the program in their school library.*

added impetus to other AHEC-supported public school programs.

**Developing the course.** An ad hoc advisory group was convened consisting of public school teachers and administrators, representatives of voluntary health associations, and AHEC staff members. From July to December 1982, the advisory group met frequently to formulate the major goals and design of the course. Air-dates were also set: HEALTHWORKS would be broadcast over an 8-week period beginning September 20, 1983.

The advisory groups identified the following as the major goals of HEALTHWORKS:

- to improve both the quantity and the quality of health education in public school classrooms;
- to motivate teachers and students to make lifestyle changes that could lead to healthier lives; and
- to increase the use of high-quality health education materials that are available nationally at little or no cost.

The group also suggested that the design of the course include videotaped segments, interactive discussions between the presenters and

teachers located at remote sites, small group workshops, a written performance contract for the teachers, and a mandatory program evaluation.

With these guidelines established, the AHEC staff began production of the videotaped segments. They designed HEALTHWORKS as a comprehensive survey of current health education materials and methods. To maintain the teachers' interest in the videotaped segments, they varied the format to include interviews, short lectures, demonstrations, and summaries. Each segment was introduced by one or two hosts, who introduced other presenters and provided continuity throughout the segment.

Information on major topics covered by HEALTHWORKS (nutrition, fitness, substance abuse, dental hygiene, and stress management) was organized into nine departments:

- Headlines on Health—the latest news about the topic;
- Coming to Terms—basic definitions related to the topic;
- Fact or Fiction—common myths and misconceptions;
- Signs and Signals—symptoms of students with potential health problems related to the topic;

- **Methods and Materials**—demonstrations of teaching materials and techniques related to the topic;
- **In Your Own Backyard**—suggestions for identifying local resources to assist in teaching the topic;
- **Who, What, Why**—discussion of typical student questions about the topic;
- **On the Front Lines**—tips on problems in teaching the topic;
- **Parents in Action**—suggestions for involving parents in the teaching process.

The HEALTHWORKS segments were videotaped by the Center for Excellence, Inc., a nonprofit educational organization in Williamsburg, Va. The center also broadcast the taped segments and provided the mechanism for the interactive discussions that followed the broadcasts.

The videotaped format was selected over live telecasts so that the AHEC staff could maintain tight control over the content of the course, ensuring that the information was both current and accurate. Although the vast majority of the content of HEALTHWORKS was presented in the videotaped segments of the course, opportunities to clarify and elaborate on topics and to demonstrate additional methods and materials were thought to be essential supplements. The interactive discussions between presenters and teachers and the small group workshops were designed to meet this need.

Participation by teachers in the interactive discussions was optional, but attendance at one or more workshops was not. Teachers were required to select several workshops to attend, the number depending on the amount of credit the individual teacher wanted to receive for the course.

Workshops were presented by the American Heart Association, American Cancer Society, American Lung Association, American Dairy Council, and American Automobile Association. Teachers attending the workshops received packets of curriculum materials that had already been field-tested. Methods of using the materials while teaching language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies were emphasized during the workshops. The intent was to help teachers integrate health education throughout the curriculum rather than isolate it in a restricted time period devoted solely to health.

**Performance contracts.** To guarantee that HEALTHWORKS would produce results, each teacher taking the course was required to complete a performance contract, specifying that he or she would develop and implement 20 hours of health education in the classroom, to be given over a 10-week period. Review of the contracts by the teachers' principals and by the AHEC staff was also required.

There were no detailed guidelines for the contracts. A teacher with an interest in nutrition, for example, could choose to devote the entire 20 hours to nutrition, while another teacher might choose to focus on fitness and substance abuse. The 20 hours could be devoted exclusively to health education or could be integrated with the teaching of basic reading, writing, and mathematics.

**Evaluation.** To evaluate HEALTHWORKS, the AHEC staff designed a two-stage process. First, they reviewed the performance contracts submitted by the teachers to assess the degree to which methods and materials covered in HEALTHWORKS were actually used in the classroom. Second, all teachers taking the course were required to answer a questionnaire that provided demographic information on themselves and their school systems, their assessments of the individual segments, and their rating of the overall value of the course.

**Initial results.** HEALTHWORKS is a pilot project whose development was supported through a cooperative agreement between the Eastern Virginia AHEC and the Health Resources and Services Administration's Bureau of Health Professions, and through a grant from the Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance. It aired for the first time on September 20, 1983, and since then has been seen by more than 150 Virginia teachers. As a result of the course, these teachers have developed more than 3,000 hours of health education activities in their classrooms, reaching more than 4,000 public school students from kindergarten through sixth grade.

The performance contracts indicate that the teachers are using the methods and materials covered in HEALTHWORKS. They are also calling on local health professionals to participate in classroom health activities. The questionnaires completed by the teachers

indicate that they found all of the televised segments and workshops to be worthwhile and the overall value of the course to be either high or very high. Moreover, cooperation among the AHEC staff, health professions schools, practicing health professionals, voluntary health agencies, and public school teachers is continuing in further efforts to teach students about healthier lifestyles.

The AHEC staff plan to continue the HEALTHWORKS program. They also plan to update the information it contains, prepare print materials to supplement the televised segments, and distribute the course nationally.

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