

# In the Bookstores

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*Health Communication: From Theory to Practice*

by Renata Schiavo;  
Jossey-Bass, 2013.

ISBN: 978-1-118-12219-8 (paperback).  
57.50 GBP. 656 pages.

## An excellent textbook loaded with theory and case studies for practice, but more useful alongside a health communication course

If you are a practicing writer or speaker working on serious topics – like communicating health to the public – with much responsibility and preparation from your side, this is the book for you. This is not a book to read just once, but one to keep as a reference and to re-read several times.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I introduces health communication in three chapters. Chapter 1 deals with various definitions of health and health communication, and what health communication is and is not about. Chapter 2 is nothing but theory on health communication, with a list and description of various communication models. The prime aim of this chapter is to show how interdisciplinary health communication is, and should be. Chapter 3 revolves around the cultural influences that play important roles in deciding what to communicate, and how. This chapter provokes the reader with a lot of philosophical questions as to whether the listed principles can be put into practice in the field effectively.

Part II of the book is all about health communication approaches – how to communicate a particular health issue to the public, based on the theory. Chapter 4 deals with the psychological aspects of health communication. For example, how a health communicator, such as a member of a non-governmental organisation (NGO), could counsel patients using technology or other means of communication. Chapter 5 deals with communication channels – the mass media and the modern (social/visual) media. How to make use of a web page, a blog, or mobile interactive features such as apps is covered.

Chapter 6 details the tips and tricks to mobilise the public towards a significant change in healthcare or hygiene practice in a community. In this chapter, the author gives a lot of ‘advice’ as to how a healthcare provider can reach their audience, be credible, and be a fulcrum for a social change. Chapter 7 is all about professional medical communication. This is an umbrella chapter that deals with strategic communication within and between communities of physicians, nurses, therapists, social workers, and, importantly, patients. The chapter, besides dealing with principles, also lists the tools for effective professional communication.

Chapter 8 is for communication partners who operate between communities in the health communication chain, acting as connecting links in health communication and relaying information between communities. Chapter 9 is one of the pivotal chapters, as it highlights the issues around public advocacy of any factor that affects the public in relation to healthcare. Since old and new media play major roles in conveying policy changes to the public, public advocates of healthcare must handle misunderstandings by the public carefully, just like a tightrope walker. Effective advocacy is what successfully takes messages to homes. With some examples, the chapter stitches theory to practice.

Part III is about planning and executing a communication intervention. Chapter 10, for instance, explains why planning is important, and how to plan effective communication. With details of the key elements of planning, the chapter describes how to conceive and convey a message to reach the public correctly. This is one chapter that a *MEW* reader might find particularly engaging, since medical writing is about ‘pharma for the public’, albeit only through regulatory bodies (indirect communication). Planning effectively to communicate the clinical aspects of a drug to regulatory bodies will benefit physicians, public health workers, and ultimately the public. Hence, a *MEW* reader might silently bookmark this chapter for re-reading.

Chapter 11 details the methods for researching and recognising suitable times and situations to communicate, for instance, creating awareness

campaigns during an epidemic. Situation analysis is the backbone of the chapter, and the research methods described could be handy for public healthcare practitioners and communicators. Chapter 12 is on 'how to do' the communication – the objectives and strategies. Chapter 13 is on designing the materials to implement a health communication topic in practice, and how to implement the communication programme itself. The chapter also deals with how to heed problems during communication, by establishing issue management and monitoring teams. Chapter 14 deals with trends, strategies, and practices in evaluating a health communication programme, in addition to the writing of evaluation reports.

Chapters 15 and 16 give the reader case studies from the field from the USA and Europe, respectively, showcasing how communicators have worked in different health areas such as mental health and chronic diseases. After a heavy meal of theory, this dessert will keep the reader's mind lingering on the whole feast.

Renata Schiavo, the author of the book, is a health communication specialist. She is also the founding president and CEO of the Health Equity Initiative,

a non-profit organisation that is dedicated to enlightening patients with health information, and to helping them get fair access to healthcare systems. Her book is targeted to whoever contributes in one way or another to public health, from NGO workers, healthcare policy makers, and doctors to the media.

This is a book in which a communication academic informs, on behalf of the public, on what, when, how, and at what level to communicate. If it is not a boon for medical writers, it is certainly a good reference. But what the book asks the reader for is a good attention span or repeated reading to get them through the theory it outlines – of which there is almost too much – before it concludes with case studies from the field. The large amount of theory means you would need either a health communication course or dedicated study using other references from a library or the Internet if you are to utilise this book to its fullest. Otherwise it is a wonderful textbook that has a plethora of cues to ponder and work on.

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