Health Risk Communication

January 1990 through October 2000

847 Citations
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January 1990 through October 2000, plus selected earlier citations

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INTRODUCTION

There are many challenges in how we communicate risk, especially risks to health. Few areas continue to stir debate more than advances in medicine and biotechnology. Stem cell research, vaccine development, and genomic manipulation are but a few of the areas under recent attack. Even public health successes that have decreased morbidity and mortality--such as vaccination, air bags, and fluoridation--have been surrounded by controversy. Scientific and health literacy require understanding, but the incremental and imprecise nature of science and experimentation that contribute to defining risk thrives on doubts, criticism, and debate, which often translate into only theoretical causality and "risk." Furthermore, scientifically valid information is not absolute and may change over time. Translating theoretical (imprecise and incomplete) and changing knowledge of causality and risk has developed into its own body of knowledge called "risk communication." According to a 1996 National Research Council report* risk communication "emphasizes the process of exchanging information and opinion with the public."

Recognizing the challenges to health progress that lie in the communication process, not in the laboratory, we created this issue for the Current Bibliographies in Medicine (CBM) series. Our overarching goal was to identify a body of published knowledge relating to risk communication from multiple perspectives. This bibliography was also developed to complement the presentations at the International Symposium on Health Risk Communication: Uncertainty, Stakeholders, and Public Health Action held on November 1-3, 2000 in Bethesda, Maryland. The Symposium was sponsored by the Subcommittees on Risk Communication and Education and International Health of the US Department of Health and Human Services Environmental Health Policy Committee. Citations for the bibliography were gathered from sources including, but not limited to, bibliographic databases, online catalogs, the Internet, and printed publications. Single words ("risk" and "communication") and the phrase "risk communication" were used to search electronically. The contents of some journals were also searched and reviewed in print or electronically. From the 4,000 bibliographic citations located through these sources, English language publications about risk communication were selected which focus primarily on risk communication of scientific information rather than on risk assessment, risk management, risk factors, risk behavior, risk taking, decision making, hazard communication, duty to warn/informed consent, or other dimensions of communicating about health risks. Similarly, this publication does not focus on health interventions, health education, health promotion, or advertising, although these are important topics in the overall picture of how scientific risks are communicated to the public. The scholarship in each of these other subjects alone is far greater than could be represented here. Our concern for this bibliography is with the presentation of scientific risk information; the strategies, tactics, and models that are used to communicate scientific risk information to an audience; and the difficulty of translating scientific knowledge in a meaningful way to enable the public to make informed health decisions.

In the efforts to meet the challenges imposed by scientific progress, perhaps this CBM can help to advance a common lexicon for health literacy, risk comprehension, and public health priorities. Use of such terms such as "infinitesimal" and "probable" in defining risk place a great responsibility on those who determine what information is valuable and salient for their audience. A high ethical standard has thus become necessary for the purveyors of health--whether they are in academia, marketing, publishing, (new) media, or other fields of

public address. To facilitate optimal decision making, finding ways to increase the quality of information becomes more important than increasing the quantity of information. Ideally, this CBM and the symposium it supports will contribute to the body of communication knowledge that advances salient, valuable, factual, and ethical risk information.

The compilers wish to thank Dorothy Moore of the Specialized Information Services Division, NLM, for her valuable assistance in the production of this bibliography.

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Sample journal and monograph citations appear below. For journal articles written in a foreign language, the
English translation of the title is placed in brackets; for monographs, the title is given in the original language.
In both cases the language of publication is shown by a three letter abbreviation appearing at the end of the
citation.

Note also for journal articles that an availability statement follows many citations. This statement contains the
Internet address for the citation in the NLM PubMed® retrieval system. The PubMed record includes an
abstract for most articles and may also provide a link to the publisher's Internet site.

**Journal Article:**

*Authors*    *Article Title*

Gotsch WD, Griffith BC. Strategies to improve risk communication: foreword.

*Abbreviated Journal*    *Date*    *Volume*    *Issue*    *Pages*

*Title*

**Monograph:**

*Authors/Editors*    *Title*

Bennett P, Calman K, editors. Risk communication and public health.

*Place of*    *Publisher*    *Date*    *Total No.*

*Publication*    *of Pages*

*Title*

*For details of the formats used for references, see* the following publication:

Overview, Background, and History


Childs B, Hickman F. Human genetics: one approach to scientific literacy. Daedalus 1983 Spring;112(2):189-209.


Department of Health and Human Services (US), PHS Environmental Health Policy Committee, Subcommittee on Risk Communication and Education. Recommendations to improve health risk communication: a report on case studies in health risk communication [monograph on the Internet]. Washington (DC): The Department; 1994 Nov [modified 1999 Oct 8; cited 2000 Sep 25]. Available from:

http://www.health.gov/environment/Recomm/reportTOC.htm


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Global Issues and Cultural Diversity


Public Understanding of Science


Zehr SC. Scientists’ representations of uncertainty. In: Friedman SM, Dunwoody S, Rogers CL, editors. Communicating uncertainty: media coverage of new

**Public Perception of Risk**


Frewer L, Shepherd R. Attributing information to different sources: effects on the perceived qualities of information, on the perceived relevance of information, and on attitude formation. Public Understand Sci 1994;3:385-401.


Hanson D. Publics misconceptions act to bar effective risk communication. Chem Eng News 1989 Sep 25;67(39):30-1.


Kline KN, Mattson M. Breast self-examination pamphlets: a content analysis grounded in fear appeal


Strasser T, Gallagher J. The ethics of health communication. World Health Forum 1994;15(2):175-


Models, Techniques, and Strategies of Risk Communication


23


Centers for Disease Control (US), Epidemiology Program Office. Surveillance in a suitcase [monograph on the Internet]. Atlanta (GA): Emory University, Rollins School of Public Health; [modified 1999 Oct 8; 2000 Sep 25]. Lesson 8, Communicating information for action; [9 p.]. Available from: http://www.cdc.gov/epo/surveillancein/lesson82.htm


Heath RL. Corporate environmental risk communication: cases and practices along the Texas Gulf Coast. In: Burleson BR, editor. Communication


**Government and Other Agency Role in Risk Communication**


Subject Specific Issues in Risk Communication

Medical Risk


Fulltext at: http://www.cdc.gov/nip/vacsafe/research/ped.htm


Edwards A, Pill R, Stott N. Communicating risk. Use of standard terms is unlikely to result in standard


http://www.nap.edu/books/0309057914/html


Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=99070507&dopt=Abstract


Environmental Risk

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (US). Public health statements: what you need to know about toxic substances commonly found at Superfund hazardous waste sites. Atlanta (GA): Department of Health and Human Services (US), Public Health Service; 1992?


Irvine L, Crombie IK, Clark RA, Slane PW, Feyerabend C, Goodman KE, Cater JI. Advising


Chess C, Saville A, Tamuz M, Greenberg M. The organizational links between risk communication and


McMahan S, Meyer J. Communication of risk information to workers and managers: do industrial
hygienists differ in their communication techniques? Am Ind Hyg Assoc J 1996 Feb;57(2):186-90.


Other Risks


Tilden J, Hanrahan LP, Anderson H, Palit C, Olson J, Kenzie WM. Health advisories for consumers of Great Lakes sport fish: is the message being received?


