Communications at NICHD

Paul Williams
Director, Office of Communications
About me

• Started at NICHD in January 2015, after more than a decade in NIAID communications

• 20+ years experience in Journalism and Corporate, Government communications
  o Began career as a technology reporter in Silicon Valley, moved on to several internet startups

• **Fun facts:** proud father of two daughters (ages 8 and 11), snowboarder, harmonica player, terrible golfer
About the Office of Communications

- Director
  - Deputy Director
  - Admin Asst
  - News & Science Writing Team
  - Public Info & Outreach Team
OC functions

News and Science Writing

• Media relations
• Writing and editing
• Crisis communications/strategic messaging
• Video development
• Website content management
• Newsletters

Public Information & Outreach

• Communications planning
• Public health awareness campaigns
• Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)
• Public inquiry response
• Publications about NICHD science
So Why Do We Need Communications, Anyway?
We have important stories to tell

• NICHD mission is essential and applies to a large portion of our society
  o The knowledge you generate helps us understand our world and sometimes helps us intervene when things go awry

• People are watching: public, media, advocacy groups, etc.

• Communications help influence perceptions about NICHD among these audiences

• Our content/materials help convey that the public’s sizable investment in NICHD continues to achieve significant returns
We live in interesting times

- Rejection/distrust of science, expertise (vaccines, climate, GMOs)
- Fewer trained reporters, editors ("citizen journalism")
- Dr. Google
- Misinformation at your fingertips
- Many competing for the almighty eyeball:
  - Standards are lower
  - Conflict, controversy, and iconoclasts
  - Shock value, going viral, click bait
We live in interesting times (cont.)

• Content is in high demand:
  o 24-hour news cycle (Example: news segments devoted to reading tweets on the air)
  o Internet-connected mobile devices are ubiquitous

• We need to help meet this demand with stories of research discovery/progress

• We need to reach people where they are (living room, waiting room, subway, etc.)

• Bottom line: The more we share, the more compelling our overall story becomes
How Do We Communicate?
Reaching the news media

- Monitor scientific papers/articles generated by NICHD intramural & extramural
- Work internally to determine newsworthiness
- Draft and vet releases internally and with institutional PIOs
- Send to reporters worldwide
- nichdpress@mail.nih.gov

NEWS RELEASES

Tuesday, August 23, 2016

New strategy holds promise for detecting bacterial infections in newborns

NIH-supported study could improve diagnosis, treatment for infants with fevers.

Researchers supported by the National Institutes of Health have shown that it’s possible to diagnose a bacterial infection from a small sample of blood — based on the immune system’s response to the bacteria — in infants with fevers who are 2 months of age or younger. With additional research, the new technique could be an improvement over the standard method, which requires isolating live bacteria from blood, urine or spinal fluid and growing them in a laboratory culture. The study, funded in part by NIH’s Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), appears in the Aug. 23, 2016, issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Health care providers who evaluate young infants with fevers have limited means to quickly and accurately diagnose whether or not an illness results from a bacterial infection. Determining if the illness is caused by bacteria may involve complicated medical procedures, such as a lumbar puncture (spinal tap). While they wait for the test results, physicians also may need to admit the infant for a lengthy hospital stay or prescribe antibiotics, which may later turn out to be unnecessary.

“The development of a fast and noninvasive diagnostic tool holds promise for better outcomes and lower treatment costs for young infants with fevers of unknown cause,” said Valerie Maholmes, Ph.D., chief of NICHD’s Pediatric Trauma and Critical Illness Branch.
Reaching the news media (cont.)

- Targeted, personal outreach to reporters
- Podcasts (think NPR-type interviews)
- Inbound media inquiries, consultation, messaging
- Basic workflow: internal discussion, drafting, vetting with program et al, and then dissemination
- **Fun fact:** AP placenta article (8/16) had over 568 million impressions (result of pitch)
Going direct

• Direct messaging to the public, bypassing media

• Thought-leader blogs

• Past topics include Zika, Human Placenta Project, benefits of reading to children, rehab research, reducing youth violence
Top story: “Couples’ pre-pregnancy caffeine consumption linked to miscarriage risk” (March 2016):

- More than 1.3 billion impressions or nearly 40% of NICHD total for the month
2016 YTD media mentions

- Over 25.4 billion total impressions (~3.33 views for every person on the planet):
  
  - January: “Pre-pregnancy potato consumption may be linked to gestational diabetes risk” drove more than 1 billion impressions or nearly 43% of total for the month
  
  - February: “Vaginal ring provides partial protection from HIV in large multinational trial” generated more than 1 billion impressions or more than 33% of total for the month
  
  - July: “NIH funds Zika virus study involving U.S. Olympic team” resulted in more than 361 million impressions or nearly 33% of total for the month
Harnessing social media

- Interact directly with the public
- Fast, inexpensive promotion and dissemination (esp. for grantee studies, campaigns)
- Share messages graphics/videos to attract people to NICHD science
- Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube
• **FB:** ~18,900 followers
  - Launched in 2012
  - NIAID (launched 2008): ~40,200
  - NIDDK: ~26,100
  - NIAMS: ~7,500

• **Twitter:** ~6,600 followers
  - Launched in 2014
  - NIAID (launched 2008): ~31,800
  - NIDDK: ~908
  - NIAMS: ~8,100

### NICHD Facebook Activity, January-July 2016

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<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
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<th>New followers per month</th>
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### NICHD Twitter Activity, January-July 2016

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<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>New followers per month</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mentions</td>
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<td>129</td>
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Reddit example

- Social discussion website with sub-channels devoted to various topics, including science

- On 9/9, Dr. Spong did an Ask Me Anything chat about Zika virus and pregnancy:
  - 428 questions/comments
  - Answered 18 in 90 minutes
  - During day, ranked as high as #2 on Reddit homepage
  - Better moderation, questions than other venues
  - Longer, in-depth answers
NICHDevelopments

• Monthly roundup of news, funding opps

• 4,673 subscribers YTD

• Open rate = 35% (avg. govt ~21%)

• Click rate = 9.1% (avg. govt 2.5%)

• Interested? http://go.usa.gov/xDp5m
NICHD website

• Latest news, org. info, funding, intramural labs, etc.

• Most popular section: A to Z Topics (centrally located info about mission-related issues and conditions)

• Fully responsive on mobile devices as of early 2016
• Approx. **50/50** desktop vs. mobile users

• ~75 percent of traffic comes from search engines

• Popular topics: Safe to Sleep, STDs/STIs, contraception, adrenal gland disorders

• NLM is top referrer, followed by NIH, CDC

• Of our social sites, Facebook refers the most, followed by Pinterest
Spanish website

- A to Z Topics, press releases translated and designed for Spanish speakers
- Roughly 45,000 unique visits per month
- Popular topics: Contraception, adrenal gland disorders, STDs/STIs (similar to English site)
- Primary referrers: search engines (~60%), social media (mostly FB)
Outreach

- Evidence-based campaigns and programs to disseminate health messaging to target audiences

- Health care providers, parents, family members, etc.

- Depending on program, goals are to raise awareness, influence behavior change, and increase adoption of evidence-based health practices

- Includes efforts to share NICHD science with different communities, such as providers (e.g., nurses) and at-risk groups (e.g., American Indian/Alaska Natives)
Outreach (cont.)

• The NICHD Information Resource Center (IRC) is a critical piece of our outreach.

• Direct interaction with the public: ordering NICHD publications, asking questions pertaining to health and other areas.
  - In 2015, IRC fielded more than 1,500 inquiries re: animal welfare.

• Also engages the public at health fairs, conferences, meetings.
2016 YTD outreach highlights

• NCMHEP launch of Moms’ Mental Health Matters:
  o Medscape CE/CME (launched 8/10): 12,040 health care providers took the course (1,899 physicians and 9,820 nurses and nurse practitioners)

• STS launch of video PSA targeting grandparents:
  o Airing in health care provider offices in states with high rates of SUID/SIDS deaths (AL, AR, KY, WV, OK, LA, MS, SC)
  o 365 offices for 8 weeks (August 8 to October 2) = 720 spots and 861,400 impressions (adults 18+)

• STS online nurse’s CE activity (revised 2015):
  o 2014 = 7,272 participants, 2015 = 9,376
  o YTD 2016 = more than 13,000 have passed the course
• **Fun fact:** FAQs = most visited page during traffic spikes (indicating search engine referral, Dr. Google effect)
2016 YTD outreach highlights (cont.)

- MSY completed its mini-grant program to 50 groups across United States:
  - Teen leaders teach after-school curriculum to other kids
  - Focus on healthy eating habits, reading food labels, understanding food advertising

- As of July, IRC fielded 13,716 inquiries (~94/business day) and distributed 1.8M publications:
  - 84% of pub orders come from individuals. Of these, nurses (21%) and educators (16%) order most often

- NICHD exhibited at 6 meetings of professional societies and 2 health fairs
Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

- All hail Earl Blansfield!
- Avg. case is 200-400 pages
- Larger ones = 1,500-2,000; can include photo/video
- Largest = **30,700 pages or 1,228 lbs. of paper (> ½ ton)**
- Work efficiently to capture, review, and release documents
Some Words About Video
Using video for storytelling

• Shows human side of NICHD, puts a face to a name

• Asks less of the user (watch vs. read)

• Can be done in-house at much lower cost

• Works for both intramural and grantee research
Questions?
pwilliams@mail.nih.gov
Extra Slides
OC functions (cont.)

Deputy Director

• Overall contract management
• Editorial policy and procedure
• Logo usage and implementation
• Assistance with day-to-day operations
• Website liaison
• Special projects (e.g., hallway, PregSource)
Audiences

**Primary**
- General public (English- and Spanish-speaking)
- Parents, patients, and caregivers
- News media, including bloggers
- Researchers, trainees, and grantee institutions
- Health care providers and professional societies
- Community partners
- NIH and other government agencies

**Secondary** (important, but served primarily by other parts of NICHD)
- Congress and policymakers
- NICHD employees
- NICHD advisory bodies
- Friends of NICHD and other advocacy groups
A - In March 2015, the story “El trabajo físico, la hipertensión y el consumo de múltiples medicamentos pueden disminuir la fertilidad masculina” drove over 259 million impressions, 19.7% of the month’s total impressions.

B - In June 2015, the story “Researchers design placenta-on-a-chip to better understand pregnancy” drove over 449 million impressions, 31.1% of the month’s total impressions.

C - In September 2015, the story “NIH study finds racial, ethnic differences in fetal growth” drove over 73 million impressions, 4.5% of the month’s total impressions.

D - In January 2016, the story “Pre-pregnancy potato consumption may be linked to gestational diabetes risk” drove over 1 billion impressions, 42.7% of the month’s total impressions.

E - In February 2016, the story “Vaginal Ring Provides Partial Protection from HIV in Large Multinational Trial” drove over 1 billion impressions, 33.4% of the month’s total impressions.

F - In March 2016, the story “Couples’ pre-pregnancy caffeine consumption linked to miscarriage risk” drove over 1.3 billion impressions, 39.3% of the month’s total impressions.

G - In May 2016, the story “Zika virus damages placenta, kills fetal mice” drove over 113 million impressions, 7.7% of the month’s total impressions.

H - In July 2016, the story “NIH funds Zika virus study involving U.S. Olympic team” drove over 361 million impressions, 32.6% of the month’s total impressions.
Monthly website visits, comparison

- Avg. NICHD visits = ~440,000
- Comparison of 30-day totals of other govt. websites

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<th>Website</th>
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<td>cdc.gov</td>
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<td>nihbi.nih.gov</td>
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<td>emailus.usps.com</td>
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Safe to Sleep® Campaign: Web Traffic—January 2015 to July 2016

Number of Visits

- 31,282 Plowshare Safe to Sleep PSA
- 40,928 SIDS Awareness and Hispanic Heritage Month e-blasts
- 45,438 "Bernie Baby" death from SIDS
- 37,681 STS website design and function improvements
- 42,509 Grandparents Safe Sleep PSA
Dear Media Smart Youth Team:

I am writing to tell you about the AMAZING workshop that I facilitated at a community center where I live. This year was different from the workshop last year because I had 2 other MSY Teen Leaders co-facilitate with me at the Boys & Girls Club. So this year, I was the only MSY Teen Leader and I had to work by myself with the staff at the Alive Center which has a mission to serve local teens who are interested in connecting with what makes them come alive by increasing their health and well-being. I collaborated with the Executive Director and staff at the Alive Center to plan the workshop, recruit students, and provide a fun learning environment.

There were 12 students who participated from grades 6 to 12 (most were 7th graders), and we all had fun! When I surveyed the students to find out what was the strangest food they ever made, the deep fried Oreos were the most bizarre. The exercise for reading nutrition labels was an eye-opener for everyone. A local grocery store chain, Fresh Thyme Farmers Market provided most of the food, which the students had no problem going back for seconds and thirds.

Thank you so much for organizing the MSY Teen Leaders program! It has truly helped me to develop my passion for teaching and leading others. My next plan is to collaborate with the 4H program in my area to train student leaders at a predominantly Spanish speaking high school to be able to deliver the MSY curriculum in their community. I did not find any materials on the MSY website in Spanish. If you have some MSY materials in Spanish, I would like to make them available to the high school students I will be training to lead MSY workshop sessions. If not, I will find out if there are ways the students leading the sessions can translate the materials for parents.

Once again, thank you so much for providing the MSY curriculum for free! I have attached photos and a promotional article for your archives. http://www.dailyherald.com/article/20160815/life/160819406/

Sincerely,

Mariel Thompson
MSY Teen Leader
Naperville, Illinois