

**Dear Dr Farhud
Editor in Chief**

It is a well-known fact that in our daily life we can learn from everything including the good communication practices among health professionals.

Delayed communication is a challenge for effective health management in many parts of the world in particular the developing countries.

Sometimes we learn lessons from a simple exchange of emails between a national public health officer and a WHO program manager. As an example, few weeks ago I sent the following email message to Dr Keiji Fukuda the Special Adviser on Pandemic Influenza to the Director General, World Health Organization as follows:

Dear Dr Fukuda

First of all I should congratulate you for your excellent work including valuable information being conveyed to the Member States through the WHO Site concerning the most recent developments in the area of the new Influenza A (H1N1) so called Pandemic (H1N1) 2009. However, sometimes there is contradictory information placed on some of the popular sites of the world which is misleading. As an example, I would like to refer to the Yahoo News which refers to the interview of the Director General in Paris. I am sure the text published by the (AFP) is at least to some extent manipulated. Also the text of the Article is somehow different with the title. This is in contrast with the excellent document placed on the WHO site under the Global Alert and Response (GAR) entitled "preparing for the second wave: lessons from current outbreaks of Pandemic (H1N1)2009, briefing note 9. Whereas I have no doubt about the fast and extensive spread of the pandemic. I personally disagree with the exaggerations being made by the media/press concerning the intensity and the dangers of the pandemic which creates a lot of tension among the populations and results in a great deal of unnecessary expenses due to over doings by the Member States. I believe, while we should closely and seriously continue to monitor the spread, trend and intensity of the pandemic and its impact on the health system, at the same time we should mitigate its harmful effects on the populations and be prepared for unusual /unexpected changes of the virus. In my view, we should not overestimate the magnitude of the problem as it may result in overspending of the limited resources which are badly needed for other priority problems of the countries. Furthermore, we may lose the trust and confidence of the decision makers and the communities, should we commit mistakes in our judgments or make unjustified recommendations. Although I have a lot more to say and share with you, I stop here and look forward to receiving your comments and guidance on the subject. Last but not least, may be because of the same reasons, as a member of the National Technical Committee on Influenza. Most of the times I have different views on the issues. That is why sometimes, I think either I am "Dumb" or others are "Deaf" or both.

**With best wishes
Bijan**

Surprisingly, I received the following response from Dr Fukuda the same day in two hours:

Dear Dr Sadrizadeh

Thank you for your note. I think we are now entering into the most difficult period so far in terms of communications. There is so much second guessing going on. Plus there is the usual reporting in which the reporters did not get it right. For example, after the Le monde article I believe the DG was quoted in some places as saying "unbelievable" rate when she said that the speed of spread is unprecedented, and that this H1N1 virus spread further in 6 weeks than in 6 months with previous pandemics. We are also seeing stories which are simply a manipulation.

Some of the issues, however, are also extremely difficult to explain. The spread has been very fast. Most people develop self limited illness. However, there is still much concern because those who die are more likely to die from an unusually rapid and severe respiratory failure, thought to be initiated by primary viral pneumonia, rather than the causes usually seen with seasonal flu and those dying are also much younger. Finally, many countries have been able to function during the pandemic. However, some countries and their health systems have undergone extreme stress. Finally, we need to know what is going on now but must be prepared for the future- which could be a less severe disease, the same thing, or a more severe disease.

Putting this all together in a way the regular person can understand has not been easy, so typically, a reporter stresses one or another aspect and we often see imbalanced stories.

anyway I believe the answer is not to try and correct all of these stories one by one-an endless task-but to further develop our communications and information strategy so that WHO is more consistently putting out accurate information on a regular basis. We will step up.

It is very good to hear from you and best regards.

Keiji

The interesting point in the above exchange of emails is the fact that somebody in WHO has the responsibility of dealing with the fourth global influenza pandemic, so called "Pandemic (H1N1) 2009" finds himself under obligation to respond to somebody else who may not be even known to him, in a transparent, fast and comprehensive manner.

I firmly believe that the same type of communication should exist between the health professionals and managers everywhere, both within the countries and between the countries and the WHO, if we are going to tackle the health problems of the world today successfully.

Yours sincerely

Bijan Sadrizadeh

President of Iranian Public Health Association