Risk (and Benefit) Communication: Challenges and Resources

Baruch Fischhoff
FDA
Risk Communication Advisory Committee
August 14, 2008
Context

Under FDAAA (2007)
permanent committee
specific charges (recalls, DTC …)
general consultation resource

Effectiveness will depend on
our usefulness to staff
strength of science that we bring
resources committed to science
Strong Citizen Support for Trustworthy Communication

Provide Americans with honest, accurate information about the situation, even if the information worries people.

(mean=3.6; 1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree)
(National samples: Nov 2001; N=973; Nov-Dec 2002; N=591)
One Official Endorsement
“DHHS Communication Plan for First Case of H5N1 in US”

Keep the public fully informed -- tell what we know, tell what we don’t know, and tell it often…Maintain credibility and public trust, by providing accurate, science-based information.
A Disclaimer

We are not responsible if information that we make available on this site is not accurate, complete or current. The materials on this site are provided for general information only, and any reliance upon the material found on this site will be at your own risk. We reserve the right to modify the contents of the site at any time, but we have no obligation to update any information on this site. You agree that it is your responsibility to monitor changes to the site http://www.ready.gov/america/other/notices.html
Communication Leadership
Requires

Strategic processes, integrating communication with analysis and regulation
Strategic staffing, with requisite expertise and coordination
CAN/CSA-Q850-97
Risk Management: Guideline for Decision-Makers
A National Standard of Canada
Note: Risk communication with stakeholders is an important part of each step in the decision process.

Figure 2
Steps in the Q850 Risk Management Decision-Making Process — Simple Model
Strategic Staffing Requires

*Domain specialists*, for representing the science of the risks (and benefits)*
*Risk and decision analysts*, for identifying the information critical to choices
*Behavioral scientists*, for designing and evaluating messages
*System specialists*, for creating and using communication channels
Strategic Staffing Requires

*Domain specialists*, for representing the science of the risks (and benefits)
*Risk and decision analysts*, for identifying the information critical to choices
*Behavioral scientists*, for designing and evaluating messages
*System specialists*, for creating and using communication channels
All working on their own tasks
So, No…

Psychologists inventing medicine …
Physicians, pharmacologists … pushing pet theories of citizen competence
Public affairs staff spinning the facts
Analysts independently defining value-laden terms (risk, benefit, equity…)
Definitely Not

Bio … 0.101
  with “basic facts that everyone should know”
“Messaging” sessions
  with “experts” determining content by fiat
Guidance without supporting evidence
  “so people have a feeling of control”
Universal guidance
  when values and circumstances vary
Charisma per se
Meeting Agenda

FDA staff:
  programs and needs
Non-persuasive communication:
  facilitating decision making
Persuasive communication:
  motivating protective action
Emergency communication:
  preparation and mobilization