



Social Communication Campaign in Nariño, Colombia, to Promote Early Care for Malaria

In 2008, officers and technical staff from Colombia’s Malaria Control Program expressed their concern for the lack of awareness among individuals affiliated with the social security system that malaria treatment is available to them free of charge. To address this concern, Management Sciences for Health, through its Strengthening Pharmaceutical Systems Program, working in coordination with the Ministry of Social Welfare and with support provided by the Antioquia Hospital Cooperative, conducted a study, between January and March 2009, of the populations of Tumaco (in Nariño department) and Pizarro (in Choco department).

Despite the fact that the study was limited to urban and periurban areas (with their enhanced access to health facilities), the average time between symptom onset and the provision of care in a public institution was 3.7 days. Thirty-seven percent of the population receives no care until after the fourth day.¹ One study conducted concurrently among the same population groups to determine knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) at the local level in dealing with malaria revealed that delayed treatment could be attributed to the use of traditional medicine and to the lack of trust in public institutions. One significant finding of this study was that 46 percent of those surveyed thought that public institutions charged a fee for malaria treatment. This finding confirmed the suspicions of program authorities and technicians, providing further evidence of the need to launch a social communication campaign designed to promote early treatment and care, with emphasis on the availability of free treatment in public institutions.



Graphic 1

The KAP study was used to design an instructional social communication campaign—called “Be Very Careful” (“*mucho cuidado*” in the local vernacular)—which was implemented in Tumaco in June and July of 2009. Using local expressions and idioms, the campaign focused on the need to seek early attention for health problems in general. Based on the findings of the study, a variety of communications media and resources were used to ensure the message would reach the target audience and generate the greatest possible impact: posters placed along roadsides, billboards, fliers (graphic 1), informative pamphlets (graphic 2), T-shirts, educational games, and a promotional jingle with a tropical rhythm that was aired by local radio stations. Specifically with the objective of promoting adherence to treatment for malaria, pictograms were prepared to distribute to patients during clinical consultations (graphic 3); in addition, training workshops focusing on mothers were organized, and household visits and recreational activities were

¹http://rbm.who.int/cmc_upload/0/000/012/168/m_e_en.pdf.



conducted. A web page was also prepared to inform interested parties about the implementation strategy and progress recorded.²

In August 2009, an evaluation was carried out of the campaign's initial impact. Almost 90 percent of the 84 individuals interviewed had access to one or more of the

communications media and resources used. Of 51 patients who went to a health facility with symptoms of malaria, 24 (47 percent) did so 24 hours after the onset of symptoms, while 36 (69 percent) did so 48 hours after onset. Before the campaign, only 36 percent of patients sought care prior to the second day following the onset of symptoms. Of these patients, only two were eventually diagnosed with malaria, which shows that the campaign also promoted early care for other diseases treated by the health facility.

Although the results obtained are important, it is difficult to replicate a similar campaign in other endemic areas of the country, because the impact achieved was dependent on the campaign's cultural orientation focusing on this specific target population. In addition, the multiplicity of communications media and resources used make it difficult to identify the communications strategy responsible for generating the greatest impact.



² <http://www.muchocuidao.com/index.php?limitstart=4>.