

Reporting e-health challenges for media

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Reporting on information communication technologies (ICTs) is not on the agenda of many news rooms in Africa and thus e-health stories are never reported in the mainstream media.

Reality

Journalists in Africa have not specialised in reporting on ICTs and therefore find e-health, ICT stories to be difficult to follow and cover. Political stories still overtake ICT stories in the media. Editors feel ICT stories do not make news. At the end of the day we have Journalists and editors both being gatekeepers for not allowing e-health stories to be reported in the media.

Journalists need to get ICT training and specialise in the subject area of e-health reporting. This will enable them to wear e-lens which will make them be able to analyse ICT issues and share knowledge, amplifying marginalised voices, organise political action, empower participation and sustainability and celebrate cultural and intellectual diversity.

Challenges to media

These include the following:

E-health is a new thing in Africa and this also has resulted in a few e-health professionals most of them being men. It is therefore difficult to have a woman's voice on e-health unless when e-health benefits the women e.g. in the area of reproductive health.

The media also lacks active ICT Media networks, specialised ICT publications and lack of e-conferences where stories stand a chance of being reported in the media after a presentation which is usually in written form.

Challenges in e-health delivery

These include:

Inadequate human resource, lack of expertise on health information system Technology resistance (Community), infrastructure-lack of Telecom facilities and power. Also lack of coordination and intersectoral collaboration caused by lack of awareness and sensitisation by decision makers, Journalists and health officials.

E-health publicity

There is need to popularise this new initiative especially among Journalists and also demystify e-health issues as it is the answer to Africa a rural continent. This is a fact in that Africa has suffered brain drain especially in the field of health.

There is need for a media campaign on e-health issues which would include production of visual printed materials in comprehensible languages that share information on issues that affect man and even women's daily lives.

Constraints

Many rural areas and towns in Africa do not have electricity. Electricity supply is not stable because of frequent power cuts. The equipment for Tele health is expensive Health official always need to get clearance from their bosses before talking to Journalists. E-health initiative in Africa are mainly at project level and ICT policies are still in draft form

The consumer's involvement

Journalists reporting an e-health story should include the voices of the consumers (women and men). Gender issues also need to be incorporated in e-health reporting e.g. Reproductive health. In many cases new technologies should not be imposed on a community because many times there is resistance. For this we need to make the consumer aware of e-health which is new.

Global e-conferences

There is need for Journalists to be invited so that they apart from covering the event they also learn about e-health issues. They need to be involved from the beginning so that they understand the issues as they evolve and you all know technology keeps on changing. There is also need to identify Journalists who are interested in reporting on ICTs and let them cover such events. E-conferences such as this one should also have a platform where Media people should exchange ideas and also learn about reporting e-health issues. More importantly after such a fora there is need to also form a d-group even a blog or wiki where Journalists in collaboration with Health personnel in e-health can exchange questions and share knowledge and information about e-health.

Limitations in the information Society

These include:

- Access to the Internet
- Infrastructure
- Language
- Lack of ICT tools and equipment
- Politics rule at the end of the day
- Lack of knowledge especially on e-health

Conclusion

The media has a role to play in e-health reporting by educating and informing the public on e-health issues. Health personnel need to partner with media and educate and inform them on e-health issues and developments at national, regional and global levels. Journalists need to be trained in order to demystify e-health issues in their writing so that the ordinary person can understand what e-health means as these technological terms simply put off readers who are consumers of e-health. There is need to develop an e-health tool kit for both print and electronic media which can be given to media houses for production stories, radio programmes and Television programmes. Media also needs to develop a resource on the internet where they can get info on e-health reporting as currently we have very few materials.

