

Health Science Communication: Analysis of popular health science literature in Kannada language

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Introduction

Health forms an important part of one's life and success of an individual in one's activities depends on his or her's positive health. A healthy population is the strength of a nation. Each individual has to take care of his or her health to be able to lead a normal life in the society. Today, ample facilities are available to people to take care of their health. Health information, education and communication also form a component of good health to the people.

Communication plays an essential role in disease prevention and health promotion aspects. Programmes designed to promote changes in health behavior and to encourage early detection and prompt treatment of illness have demonstrated that mass media and other communication strategies can be effective in reducing the risk of illness (US Dept. of Health Publication, 1995).

Channels of health education available in India include inter-personal communication, electronic media (audio-visuals), traditional methods (traditional plays and songs) and print media (pamphlets, leaflets, posters, brochures, manuals health care documents, periodicals like magazines, newspapers and books).

Print media is very effective in giving health information and promoting health. Health science books are most important communication strategies in providing health information through the print media. The publication of books is increasing

in spite of the fear that electronic media will overshadow it (Report of Task Force – Kannada, 2000).

Based on proliferation of these types of books, one can assume that their role in the management of illnesses is significant. An analysis of books provides some insight into the literature. It seems logical that most books emphasize treatments and alternative treatments, currently undergoing a wave of popularity, are emphasized. Medical educators might wish that patients received more information on the epidemiology, risk factors and natural history of illnesses (Aparna Padiyar, *et al.* 2001).

Effective communication of health information through books is a difficult task. Use of appropriate words in regional language understandable to the reader, authenticity of information, and availability of information form part of effective communication. The objective of the present study is to undertake an in-depth study of only the published Kannada language books on popular health sciences.

Dr R. Shivaram, a renowned physician and editor of 'Koravanji', a humour magazine (akin to the British 'Punch' magazine) of yesteryears can be considered as the father of popular medical and health science, who disseminated these subjects to the common man. His writings on mental health aspects in the titles 'Manonandana' and 'Manamanthana' are considered classical even today. Other writers of yesteryears were the late Dr Gopalakrishna Rao and Dodderi Venkatagiri Rao who published on an equally important topic of medical science, i.e., sex and sexuality. They have dealt with this subject seriously and scholarly.

In recent days, the late Dr Anupama Niranjana, the late Dr Narayanappa and more recently Dr D.S. Shivappa, Dr C.R. Chandrashekar, Dr P.S. Shankar, the late Dr S.J. Nagalothimath among others have written on various health topics. There are also examples where some medical writers have shown their creativity by writing stories, novels, and biographies in the field of medical sciences. A few such novels have also been successfully brought out as movies and have been widely appreciated by the people.

A large number of books in Kannada on various topics of health are being published since several decades. There has not been a study to look into the content of these books in respect of how the health information is being communicated to the readers, viz., content analysis which includes: (a) the depth of the subject; (b) the utility of the subject to the reader; (c) the adequacy of information; (d) the presentation of the subject including language whether it is understandable; (e) the format of presentation including paragraph construction, easily understandable words, use of illustrations, the use of good type font for better readability, the quality of printing; (f) the cost per book, whether the reader can afford to buy or not; (g) provision of bibliography for further references and (h) index. The availability of books is not organized. Because of this lacuna, the areas in which health literature needs to be created is not properly known.

The present study is an attempt at analysing and consolidating the available printed Kannada language books on popular health science literature. The product analysis covers the subject matter of health science areas, the place of publication and the trend of publication with respect to time. The other variables of the study include authors, publishers, physical size of the books and price.

The objective of the present study is to evaluate health science Kannada books on sample basis. The evaluation is made according to the information provided in the books on five aspects. These are: (i) social aspects of illness; (ii) nature of illness (biological aspects of illness); (iii) typography; (iv) explanation of technical terms, provision of subject index and finally (v) the provision of references.

Another major objective of the present research was selection of a few books for detailed evaluations on (i) content (ii) relevance (iii) clarity (iv) method of presentation (v) utility value (vi) readability (vii) illustrations, and (viii) format, the presentation of subject matter.

The Present Study

In the present study, efforts were made to find the contribution of the popular health science books to the health of

people by way of the kinds of books published in Kannada language and their contents.

The first and foremost effort of the study was collecting information on the books published. Books available with individuals, libraries and many places had to be browsed; 951 books were available from different sources. These books had to be listed in chronological order for detailed analysis.

The objectives of the analysis were:

- (i) Compile the available printed popular Kannada health science books
- (ii) Development of a tool to analyse the published books
- (iii) Evaluation of the books using the tool developed
- (iv) Draw conclusions in light of the above detailed analysis.

The classification of 951 books was made along with the help of a qualified statistician.

Detailed Evaluation

A detailed analysis of selected sample books was made. Sixty (60) popular health science books in Kannada language were selected for the purpose. The evaluation was done using the tool developed by the researcher for the purpose. The study was conducted under – 1. Readability: (i) content aspect, (ii) relevance aspect, (iii) clarity aspect; 2. Method of presentation: (iv) utility value and (v) Information aspect.

The evaluation of information provided in randomly selected 60 health science books in Kannada was made in respect of four aspects, viz., (i) social aspects of illness, (ii) nature of illness, (iii) causes of illness, (iv) prevention of illness and promotion of health.

Tentative Conclusions

1. Popular Kannada health science is a discipline by itself. Books under this discipline have been written by eminent medical practitioners, academicians, writers in science, non-medical writers, journalists and those interested in disseminating health messages.

2. Information, Education and Communication (IEC) being the pre-requisites in maintaining one's health, the popular Kannada health science books effectively reach the common man with health science messages through IEC.
3. Most of the books published are in the area of allopathic medicine. Books in ayurvedic medicine find second place. Many authors have written books and also published books by themselves.
4. There are standard publishing houses in Karnataka who have published high quality popular Kannada popular health science books, highly useful to the common man. These publishers are mainly concentrated in cities of Bangalore, Mysore and Dharwad. Often, books published in cities do not reach the interior places.
5. Health science publishing is a flourishing business. Small and medium size publishers can develop their publishing business and grow to become major publishers. Health science publishing is also a service activity and publishers can promote this activity with more conviction as they are accountable to the society.
6. Many writers, doctors and others involved in creation of health science literature need to improve their skills of writing and communication abilities. Introduction of health communication courses needs to be considered in Universities and other educational institutions.
7. The need for health information to the public in many districts is the need of the hour. People in economically backward districts do not pay attention to taking care of their health. They think about their health only when it becomes inevitable for them to go to the doctor. Often people suffer mainly because of their ignorance.
8. There is need to publish more and more popular health books to bring awareness among people about health.
9. Patient education is a vital component of an age in which a greater emphasis is placed on patient autonomy, health promotion and self care. Patients no longer take a positive role in their care, and studies show an informed, involved patient is a healthier one.

10. Low literacy has been linked to poor health outcomes such as higher rates of hospitalization and less frequent use of preventive services. Both these outcomes are associated with higher healthcare costs. The primary responsibility for improving health literacy lies with public health professionals, and the health care public health systems.

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