Update for Projects using Umbrella Generic Clearance 0910-0847 (Data to Support Social and Behavioral Research as Used by FDA)

Project Title: Comparative Effectiveness of Disease Education Messaging

The FDA Safe Use Initiative awarded a contract via the Broad Agency Announcement to investigate how FDA might better reach a consumer audience and how the selection of a spokesperson might influence message uptake.

What was the Problem to be Investigated?

Selection of a messenger, or spokesperson, to communicate health messages to the public should follow an evidence-based approach. The role of a spokesperson is to deliver information, demonstrate behavior, or provide a testimonial. This spokesperson may be helpful in attracting attention, personalizing abstract concepts by modeling actions and consequences, eliciting positive cognitive responses during processing, heightening emotional arousal via identification or transfer of affect, bolstering belief formation due to source credibility, and facilitating retention due to memorability.

Celebrity spokespersons have long been used in public outreach, education efforts and advertising regarding disease awareness, with the premise that celebrities would be more effective than traditional health authority figures in conveying the desired health messages. There are few primary studies evaluating celebrities' impact on health and there are perhaps no studies contrasting the effectiveness of different categories of messengers in a controlled trial.

WebMD conducted a survey of consumers to compare educational materials on similar topics: one set of materials featured a celebrity, one set featured an expert from a well-known medical or academic institution, and one set featured an expert from a government agency.

Method used to Obtain the Sample

Visitors to the WebMD website and WebMD newsletter subscribers who are likely cancer patients or caregivers of cancer patients viewed educational materials. A control arm was composed of WebMD visitors who did not view the educational materials. A random sample of viewers were selected to participate in the survey via interstitial invitation. No honoraria were offered.

Burden Imposed

It is estimated that the survey took 10 minutes to complete. There were 302 participants in the control arm and 1212 participants in the test group. The total burden for this collection was estimated to be 252.3 hours (1514 participants x 10 minutes).