

Marketing Strategies for Academic and Professional Organizations

I met with Dr. Utpal Dholakia a professor in the Business School at Rice University on August 3, 2017. His expertise is in marketing.

Two major suggestions/conclusions that came from this meeting were:

1. Any messaging to the lay public will be difficult, as there is no compelling reason for them to want to know about or learn about the disease. It is easier to make people aware of Sickle cell disease, if they have some interest in the disease. Hence the appropriate targets would be the patients, relatives, caregivers etc.

I differ, however, from his opinion, as SCD patient is greatly affected by the patient's environment. The target to be reached needs to be wider. The administrators and those coming in contact with the SCD patient at school, work, sports etc. can all affect the well-being of the patient by providing a supportive environment. The end result of such support would make sickle cell disease patients become more productive citizens.

Dr. Utpal suggested, the materials prepared by the committee and Newborn Screening Unit will be difficult to use for mass campaigns for awareness of sickle cell disease. The messaging for general purposes should be short and utilize newer electronic media. Programs such Facebook, Twitter or Snapchat could be used.

2. He was highly supportive of engaging the academic and professional organizations directly to come up with best methodologies/techniques to educate their own members and for them to further educate others. We have attempted this in a very limited fashion with the Community Health Workers.

Campaigns towards targeted audiences such as physicians, nurses, social workers, community health workers, patient school administrators etc. would be easier to organize compared to that for the general public.

If agreeable to the committee, I suggest we discuss ways to engage these professional organizations and involve them in Sickle Cell Awareness programs.

Alternatively, Dr. Dholakia and his colleagues (or other organizations) could develop marketing programs for this purpose. If monies were available, they would actually be keen to help develop programs for sickle cell awareness.

We as committee members have limitations in marketing expertise. One of the recommendations that the committee could make to the State of Texas Health Commissioner, could be to a request for financial support in the department's budget for SCA awareness in the next fiscal year.