Challenges in Communicating to Baby Boomers about Hepatitis C: Lessons Learned from the Know More Hepatitis Campaign

Amanda Carnes, MPH, CHES
Health Scientist
Education, Training & Communication Team

November 30, 2017
Overview

- Background
  - Hepatitis C & Baby Boomers
  - Know More Hepatitis campaign

- Formative research objectives & methodology

- Key findings & communication challenges

- Implications for campaign messaging
Hepatitis C & Baby Boomers

- Hepatitis C disproportionately affects people born from 1945-1965 (baby boomers)
  - Account for ~75% of those infected with hepatitis C and more than 70% of hepatitis C associated mortality
  - Can be asymptomatic for decades; approximately 50% unaware of their infection
  - Presence of symptoms often associated with advanced liver disease
  - Hepatitis C is a leading cause of liver cancer

- In 2012 CDC issued MMWR recommendations to test all baby boomers once for hepatitis C

- New treatments can now cure hepatitis C, so testing this population is essential in order to link those infected to lifesaving care and treatment
Know More Hepatitis

- To support testing recommendations, CDC developed a national, multimedia communication campaign, *Know More Hepatitis*

- Designed to educate baby boomers about the importance of getting testing for hepatitis C
  - Separate component targeting health professionals

- Guided by behavioral theories and grounded in formative research
Formative Research
Formative Research Objectives

- **Explore and understand:**
  - Knowledge
  - Attitudes
  - Salience

- **Assess campaign messages and gain additional insights**
  - Message attributes evaluated
    - Message clarity and comprehension
    - Overall appeal: likes/dislikes/distinctiveness
    - Credibility and persuasiveness
    - Attention-getting ability
    - Motivation to take action (search for more information, talk to a doctor, etc.)
Focus Group Methodology

- **Groups conducted 2011-2017**
- **Recruitment strategy**
  - Born from 1945-1965
  - 2/3 males
  - Mixed ethnicity & range of SES
  - Insured
- **Eight U.S. cities**
  - Baltimore, Boston, Charlotte, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Philadelphia, Seattle
- **Professional moderator and facilities**
- **Mix of exploratory & creative testing**
- **44 focus groups total**
  - Participants n= 366
  - 8-9 participants per group
  - 120 minutes in length
- **Rapid analysis procedures**
Communication Challenges

Key Findings
Low Knowledge & Awareness

- Most had a limited awareness or had inaccurate information
  - Saw a minimal uptick in knowledge in 2017 compared to previous years
- Often confused transmission routes with other hepatitis types
  - “I know of Hepatitis B, but I don’t know the difference with that and Hepatitis C. Is that the restaurant one?” Female, Seattle
- Incorrectly associated the disease with the presence of symptoms
- Most falsely assumed that they have already been tested during routine blood work
Low Knowledge & Awareness

- For some, awareness was limited to knowledge of celebrities with the disease
  - Pamela Anderson, Naomi Judd and Natalie Cole mentioned specifically
    - “The only time I really heard about it was Natalie Cole when she got it. Otherwise you really don’t hear about it unless some big person gets it.”
      Female, Baltimore

- For others, awareness resulted from a personal connection
  - Often from a friend or family member who had been diagnosed, lived with or died from liver cancer

- Only a limited number had learned that there is a cure
  - Mentioned hearing of the cure from TV ads
    - “There was some drug that you could take for 14 weeks, and it would cure it. I don’t know. I’ve seen it a few times.”
      Female, Seattle
Low Perceived Susceptibility

- Most were unaware of the disproportionate prevalence
- Messages that highlighted birth years grabbed attention and made it impossible to ignore content
- Utilizing simple, compelling data points and facts increased relevance
Low Perceived Susceptibility

- Highlighting asymptomatic nature surprised and motivated them to pay attention
Stigma & Perceived Susceptibility

- **Strong perceptions and stigma**
  - Most associate hepatitis C with risky behaviors and people other than themselves
  - Many tried to opt-out of any risk & exclude themselves from being considered susceptible

- **Imagery that contradicted stigmatized people and behaviors** was motivating to participants and provided feelings of inclusion
Perceived *Past* Susceptibility

- Nostalgic elements in creative reminded some of past behaviors and often were interpreted to have an accusatory tone
- Confusion also existed about current risk versus past risk of infection
Low Perception of Severity

- Most were largely unaware of the link to liver disease and liver cancer
  - Emphasizing the long-term risks, or the ‘so what?’, boosted motivation
  - Mentioning the link to cancer made the disease more relevant and add urgency
    - “The only thing for me, and maybe I missed it, but there was no mention of cancer, so for me I didn’t get a ‘so what’ out of it...but if somebody tells me you might have cancer, then oh s**t.” Baltimore

- Some participants saw a disconnect when the creative approach did not mirror the seriousness of the disease
  - Imagery of smiling individuals and happy couples in romantic settings contradicted messages that had a more serious tone
Get screened for Hepatitis C.
This one is easy.

Talk to your doctor about this one-time blood test, recommended for everyone born from 1945-1965.
Need for a Solution

- Communicating a solution to the problem was essential to motivation
  - Participants responded positively when messages about testing were simple and followed by language that provided a hopeful outcome
    - “Get tested. I thought that was the strongest part of it - it could save your life.” Chicago
  - Many were unaware treatments can cure hepatitis C, and highlighting that was a motivating factor
    - “I’m going to my doctor and asking about Hepatitis C blood work. If you haven’t, please do it, because I’m in that age bracket and I want to know, and what triggered me was when it said ‘causes liver disease,’ and the other point was that it’s curable.” Baltimore
Implications for Campaign Messaging
Overcoming Communication Challenges

- **Increase knowledge and awareness**
  - Provide factual information that is motivating

- **Increase salience**
  - Increase perceived susceptibility:
    - Provide information on prevalence in the population
    - Change attitudes and stigma
    - Explain why boomers need to be concerned
  - Increase perceived severity:
    - Highlight the link to liver cancer and other long term risks
    - Answer the ‘so what?’

- **Provide a solution and positive result of getting tested**
Guidelines for Messaging

- Acknowledge low awareness levels with facts and statistics that are meaningful and not difficult to interpret
- Clarity is important; being able to understand and digest information quickly is essential
Guidelines for Messaging

- Quickly emphasize resonating information, like birth years or other facts, that keep audience from self-selecting out as a target

- Avoid exclusionary information and content
  - Use inclusive language (e.g. “we got tested”) and images that show diversity of population affected
  - Avoid imagery or themes that imply a connection to risk behaviors or that call past behaviors into question

- Provide a solution to the problem to enhance motivation
  - Take advantage of motivating “hope” messages with language like “save your life” and “curable”
Examples of Key Messages

- **Increasing susceptibility**
  - 3 out of every 4 people with hepatitis C were born from 1945-1965
  - People born from 1945-1965 are 5x more likely to have hepatitis C

- **Highlighting severity**
  - Hepatitis C is a leading cause of liver cancer
  - People with hepatitis C can live for decades without symptoms or feeling sick

- **Providing a solution**
  - Getting tested is the only way to know if you have hepatitis C
  - Early detection can save lives
  - Treatments are available that can cure hepatitis C
Know Hepatitis B Campaign

- Multilingual campaign developed by CDC & Hep B United

**Objectives:**
- Increase knowledge of key facts
- Highlight link to liver cancer
- Decrease cultural stigma associated with hepatitis B

**Audience:** Asian Americans

**Main languages:** Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, English

**Implement through community engagement and partnerships**
Amanda Carnes
ccarnes@cdc.gov

For more information on the Know More Hepatitis campaign, visit www.cdc.gov/knowmorehepatitis

For more information, contact CDC
1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)

The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.