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Controversy and Concerns in the Relationship of Medicine and the Media in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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SUMMARY

Medicine and the media are two areas important in the life of every man, which are in almost daily contact with each other and in dependence. Their relations in BiH are currently elemental, focused on direct, immediate needs, without defined rules, with a lot of disorientation, incompetence and irresponsibility, often without respect for at least the minimum rules of conduct and respect, often with a lot of conflict and hostility. The goal of our work is based on the analysis of newspaper articles, TV programs and Web sites in the period of one year and was to assess the current situation and suggest solutions. In order to acquire objective insight into the current situation, in the preparation of the symposium "Medicine and Media" in Mostar, we analyzed all stories related to medicine in two daily newspapers, two weekly, three TV stations in the period from September 1st 2008 to August 31st 2009, and the web sites of hospital institutions, Department of Health Insurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Ministries of Health which were available online on 1st and 2nd September 2009. In total we managed to process 402 contents as written content, TV shows or stories in TV shows and 28 web pages, and we believe that our sample is representative. We have found the following characteristics of the current situation in BiH that have to be changed: Topics in the press, web sites or programs on health services should have some kind of certification, i.e. licensing so that is clear that the contents of the announcement is made under control of health care professionals, i.e., licensed or of optional entertainment content; In cases of professional accusation of any specific person, usually a doctor, not to state full name of the before the existence of binding court decisions, or in case of possible litigation not to allow favoring of any party of the dispute; In addition to the interest in the work of health institutions it is necessary to direct media attention towards the work of the Institute and the ministries of health insurance, because very few reports deal with their work and activities; It is necessary to emphasize investigative reporting with good topics covered by professionals and annual prizes awarded to the authors of such content about medicine in BiH should be considered.

Keywords: medicine, media, controversy, BiH

1. INTRODUCTION

Medicine and the media are two areas important in the life of every man, which are in almost daily contact with each other and dependence. Their relations in B&H are currently elemental, focused on direct, immediate

needs, without defined rules, with a lot of disorientation, incompetence and irresponsibility, often without respect for at least the minimum rules of conduct and respect, often with a lot of conflict and hostility. The goal of our work is based on the analysis of newspaper articles, TV programs and Web sites in the period of one year to assess the current situation and suggest solutions.

2. CURRENT SITUATION

In order to acquire objective insight into the current situation, in the preparation of the symposium, "Medicine and Media" in Mostar, we analyzed all stories related to medicine in two daily newspapers, two weekly, three TV stations in the period from September 1st 2008 to August 31st 2009 and the web sites of hospital institutions, Department of health insurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Ministries of Health who was available to on 1st and 2nd September 2009. In total we managed to process 402 content as written content, TV shows or stories in TV shows and 28 web pages, and we believe that our sample is representative. We have found the following characteristics of the current situation in B&H:

3. MEDIA

The media give considerable space to medicine, because they identify the importance and interest of the public for this profession. But, it is often in contradiction with the quality of access: access is usually superficial, the authors lack education, and there is little investigative journalism, specialized connoisseurs, so it all boils down to black-yellow coalition, with the neglect of responsibility. Media are involved in medicine in three areas:

- Popular activities related to medical topics
- Follow up of current events in health with appropriate contributions
- Reporting on crisis management and affairs

3.1. Popular content related to medical topics

Popular activities are favorite in the print media, because with them certain space is filled with content for which you think is interesting to users. Usually the

content is collected from the internet, without control, without accurate statistics, unprofessionally translated, often misunderstood during translation, so that poses a danger to reader, who called into question the authenticity of information, because the psychology of consumers in areas that they believe that information should be official. Following series of such articles in a daily newspaper, we concluded that the reader had a variety of activities related to health and maintaining vitality to devote 16 hours each day, and if they consumed the recommended foods in the recommended amounts should consume about 7 kg of food each day, which would still represent a particular technical problem. Writings made by health care professionals have different values, often related to the advertisement of their offices. The quality obviously depends on the author, who usually is choosing their own theme, they ask questions and write answers. Majority of articles are written with too many technical terms that are not explained in the text, unspecified conclusion, and often are linked to relatively rare diseases or conditions that represent a narrow interest of the author. Certain percentage of articles is good, clearly written in understandable language and is a contribution to the prevention of certain diseases. TV shows of this character that was available to us are with low standard of quality, whether they are of foreign origin or domestic, some of which are of superior quality and, told in a simple language, but basically a very professional and educational for health professionals. Unfortunately this profile of shows in domestic production does not foster stability, but is positive that at least it is possible to find high quality of the facilities.

3.2. Follow up of current events in health with appropriate articles

This type of articles is characteristic of daily newspapers and TV shows, of cultural character, usually poor in space and contribution. Obvious is the influence of editors and local team. Totally same event (e.g. the annual meeting of professional societies in the entity) is accompanied by different context depending on where occurred, TV contribution of several minutes, while in the second case it is not even recorded. Announcements of some "success" in medicine under the influence of the local medical authority to professional looks funny, because often is a common method adopted in most communities in B&H. Opening of some new medical capacity is accompanied by only courtesy article, although many of them require access of research journalistic teams, the evaluation of actual needs, utilization of personnel and equipment procured and spent funds. As an example is the adoption of new insurance rights package in the legislative bodies of the Federation, as it is perhaps the most important event in health care in followed year, of whom there were very few comments and articles and no one knows what is still happening with this package in cantons. Specialized journalist would understand the importance and certainly made a very interesting research that would attract more attention of public than most other topics. It is obvious that there are a small number of articles on the work of

the Institute of health insurance, because it is known to the journalists that they are closed for information, that they require pre-set questions, without prompt answers, so they avoid contact. Obvious is giving of too much space to alternative medicine probably because they are far closer to the presentation to the authors of contributions from a doctor with a mass of technical terms.

3.3. Reporting on crisis situations and affairs

This is most interesting area, because often the focus of events is in the public interest. Feature of all reports and articles that we have processed is the sensationalist approach characteristic of the black chronicle or the yellow press (so called yellow-black coalition). Commonly is used sadness and the loss of family members, for whose death are blamed doctors, facts that are illogical, usually collected phone calls without checking, without at least a professional basis, so that careful expert can assess what the possible medical error was and what is its causal connection with the disturbance of one's health or death. In everything what catches the eye is mentioning of names and surname and any other information about the "accused," although on the same page of newspapers are the usual contributions of the criminal affairs only by initials of the perpetrator. The essences in the fact that you are only stating the names and last name of the known medical worker which may sell newspapers, interest in initials is minimal. Rarely is given the space the other side, and then it is on average four times less space. Exactly the same cases is in different areas given a different publicity, depending on the prestige and influence that doctors in the center of events is (death due to acute appendicitis: written 8 times for 1 case, and one line for the second case, the death of mother during birth 24 articles compared to 1 in the other area). Typical are announcements of criminal charges, prosecution without check. We noticed a whole group of such cases with great media attention in which there was no request for start of any proceedings, whether in institutions, chamber of doctors', juridical institutions although they were announced for days.

It is obvious that today in B&H become established, in addition to the classic four types of responsibilities of doctors, the fifth one, which could be called a "journalist" or "media" responsibility. That are the cases when proceedings are not initiated for one of the common types of liability, but only the doctor is exposed to the media lynch. Whether in such cases, psychopaths prone to use the media exposure to raise circulation, or a rackets? Interesting that in such cases do not count on the possibility of lawsuits for defamation or uncontrolled reaction of attacked doctor, because, unfortunately, also in some other fields of activity are very much exposed to attacks. Some web portals for days allowed anonymous persons to insult individual doctors, to report the criminal indictment dropped, because of the guilt was not established. From to us available content during this year only in three newspapers articles and TV reports observed the problem is somewhat analytical approach and research with a professional approach, but treated with easily un-

derstood explanations. In neither one case of "scandal" is followed to end, but was ceded place to the more recent and attractive one.

4. MEDICINE

On the other hand medics are slowly adapting to the obvious need for intensive internal and external communication. Approach is arbitrary and expressed great differences from institution to institution, because there is no obligation of health facilities that would specifically regulate this area, although there are general rules.

4.1. Health institutions

Hospital and Health Care facilities throughout B&H, with the exception of clinical centers, do not have a service to inform the public, or at least the person in charge of information. Journalists usually roam using personal information provided from friends. Often information is given by unauthorized and unprofessional persons whose uncertainty causes distrust of the public. Usually there is a long waiting period for the correct information, on the given phones no one answers, possible statements are confusing, with too much details, lot of technical terms because are given by persons not educated in communication.

Health facilities are normally closed to the public, in the case where there is public interest in some cases they usually take defense attitude, with thin information, without the involvement of PR professionals, so typically in some affairs they are like a training sacks for reporters eager of sensation, waiting patiently to interest discounts in the public. Websites of majority of institutions, if any, are not updated, without information on patient rights, obligations of the institution according to patients, types of consent to medical interventions and what they mean, without possibility to make appointments for examinations over the internet, asking questions etc. They usually provide irrelevant information obviously essential to avoid those who are essential for that institution. From ten analyzed Websites of clinical centers and the cantonal hospitals in Bosnia, only one web site had complete information for all patients regarding their rights, especially the way of accommodation, ways of making a waiting list, type of consent, pricing, etc.

4.2. Health insurance institutes

From 11 observed web sites of Institutes of health insurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina (10 cantonal in Federation B&H and Health Insurance Fund in RS) on the day of observation were seven under construction (??), and only four were active. Among them only the Fund of the RS have data on the Managing Director and board, while in all institutes in the Federation there is no information about the director and members of the Governing Body. Instead fresh information on the rights of the insured provided by contracts with health organizations, activities for reduction of waiting lists, activities related to raising the quality of health services contracting organizations, we found copied laws and general acts of the Institute.

4.2. Ministries of health

The majority of the Cantonal Ministries of Health and the Ministry of the entity, as opposed to institutions, under pressure from the media have a lot of well-organized services for public relations with quality, trained PR managers, but, unfortunately, mostly through government websites or their PR, except for one entity Ministry. Only one Cantonal Ministry has its own webpage, which is updated. Openness to media is changed through the years in more quality relationship, regardless of the denial of some information. Unfortunately cantonal ministries do not have relevant data from the work of health institutions (and often do not know), prices, etc. that could present on their own pages.

5. DISCUSSION

Medicine and the media are the two perhaps most important areas in normal life of every citizen. Unfortunately their relationship is not professional and sufficiently defined; there are some general and professional rules and responsibilities of the profession and the law which leads to chaos and irresponsibility. This area is government with a little sensationalism without a moral responsibility to the public to attract media attention to an individual affair, or unusual, rare cases. Besides that, increasingly in the spotlight announcements of epidemic, with controversial information.

The race for the popularity has pushed the moral and professional values. During our observation for one year we did not registered journalists who showed characteristics of educated, specialized journalists for health with the topics covered analytically. When any such attempts were made they are limited to the dedicated time, bias and limited space.

Usually about health wrote beginner journalists without any education in the field of health or local journalists who work is under pressure from the editor. Without enough time to explore certain essential problems for the country or a local community, nor enough media space, because the ruling are the commercialism and competition.

Journalists are protected by impotence of newspaper association which are too many and obviously do not have the power to be able to direct the quality or self-criticism. Usually deal with them. Observed during the monitoring in this paper were the measures imposed by the CRA and the Press Council media outlets, which, except on the web site listed, had no special publicity in the media, like for example the one about attacks on the journalists. Advertizing cigarettes and alcoholic beverages on the site next to the tips for healthy eating leaves no doubt about the morality of those responsible, regardless of income.

Area of medicine does not have, especially in our country, the tradition to communicate. For a long time it was protected by former mystery of the profession and the absolute confidence and respect for their work. Change in relationship to medicine in our country is mainly influenced by transmission of behavior patterns from the U.S. and Western European countries where the full commercialization of health completely changed

relations. Health institutions are very slow to open, does not have Information Services, employed PR professionals, often rudimentary data required are not available to citizens or even have opinions or decisions about health care facilities.

In any case crisis occurs due to unjust attacks and often without a clear position and adequate information to the public with clear facts.

Procedure in case of an appeal on the actions of the medics is often defined in most institutions, with the exact terms and organs, which causes still doubt in the objectivity of management. Logically would be to solve the case in the institution, which avoid that, and it is usually left to the ministries and chambers, which have data and facts which may, if so, to be at disposal of institutions. Impact of this policy is not negligible, because this opinion is more important for managers of health improvement e.g. regulation of sensitive areas essential for citizens and health professional. It is obvious that there is often inaccurate information flow from the direction of medicine, which can be prevented only by duly and accurate information. Indicative example of bad information is the Departments of health insurance, which contracted services on behalf of the insured with health care facilities and under whose control are funds. Majority of institutes does not have a web site, they have a page on which there is mostly general legislation, there is no data on financial plan, funds spent, who is the director, who are members of the administrative board, their contracts with institutions, etc. Quite a dilemma and lack of trust is between them. That is primarily in a way of presenting medical content. Especially in the era of the Internet. It seems that many are not aware about responsibilities of the presentation. Without doubt is the importance of medical facilities in the prevention of mass disease, but also by the contents of the recruited mass hypochondriac who "recognize" the disease in newspapers and medical premises replace real patients.

The essential dilemma is how far you can go in providing information, especially in concrete cases. Some the right to inform understood very broadly, not wanting to understand that if the information relates to a specific person, there are significant limitations. Therefore, the concept of behavior in crisis situations is practically non-existent, which is usually the reason for the misunderstanding of medicine and the media.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Two very important areas in the life of man, medicine and media, currently in Bosnia are fully in undefined relationship, loaded with disorientation, lack of professionalism and irresponsibility. Often with plenty of conflict and hostility. Their relations in B&H are currently elemental, focused on direct, immediate needs, which creates a number of problems that require change. However, this is too important for the citizen to allow further escalation of sensationalism from one side with restriction of information on the other hand, because it significantly affected the mood of people creating an

atmosphere of tension, mistrust and anxiety, often without basis.

Instead of uneducated beginners in journalism medicine should be followed by trained journalists and specialists in health issues. On colleges should be introduced courses in medicine for journalists who want to engage in this field. They would receive a license that would allow them to write about medical topics.

A legal framework should be created for the obligation of health care organizations to create service for information, refine the tasks and services and the obligation to appoint PR manager of institution that would lead the communication facilities in the contact with the media presenting information on the work of the institution. Doctors who are authorized to give information, especially on major accidents or emergency situations must have at least minimal training in PR.

Topics in the press, web sites or programs on health services should have some kind of certification, i.e. licensing so that is clear that the contents of the announcement is made under control of health care professionals, i.e., licensed or of optional entertainment content. In cases of guilt stating for any specific person, usually a doctor, not to state full name of the existence of binding court decisions, or in case of possible litigation allows favoring any party to the dispute. In addition to the interest in the work of health institutions apparently it's necessary to direct media attention towards the work of the Institute and the ministries of health insurance, because very few reports dealing with their work and activities. It is necessary to emphasize investigative reporting with good topics covered by professionals. It would be also good to have annual prize awarded to the authors of such content about medicine in B&H.

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