

CONCLUSIONS OF THE SENC EXPERT MEETING - 2015

SENC- Expert Meeting- 2015, in collaboration with the Spanish Nutrition Foundation (FEN) and the Foundation for Nutritional Research (FIN), based on theme presentations and discussion in the various working sessions held in Bilbao on 13, 14 and 15 September 2015, agreed a number of points of interest. We describe these below with the aim they could be helpful to health journalism, health information and food issues, to contribute to increase knowledge and health promotion of the population.

1.- SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

- Journalists inform, but they do not educate the public. However, accurate and verified information can contribute to a certain extent to it.
- Nutrition and health education should be implemented and reinforced through usual regular channels.
- Further development and training for health professionals in communication skills and abilities to report on health issues to a broader audience is required.
- Users surfing the internet spend most time watching video materials. This potential can be explored and used in a rational way to inform and communicate on health related issues in an enjoyable and attractive manner.
- To be able to communicate on health issues is very important. Emotions are also relevant when informing about health.
- Press and communication offices are involved with sources of information who broadcast news related to their custo-

mers. They move and call interest related media too, but they can also operate as channels and framework for joint communication strategies on health issues by means of credible and rigorous information.

2.-HEALTH JOURNALISM

- A quarter of citizens states that gets informed on health issues through the media, both those so called generalists, as well as those specialized on health or scientific content.
- Websites and social networking sites often include health related content, yet people do not perceive them as mass media.
- It is necessary that journalist who produce this information, in any format, are properly specialized and follow ongoing training to facilitate continuous updating in their knowledge and competencies.
- 'The 7 potential biases of specialized journalists' are: sensationalism, cause alarm, create false expectations, contributing to a possible surreptitious advertising, excessive technicalities, excessive reliance on the source, deification
- It is necessary to be able to adapt to this new era: multimedia, multiplatform.
- The relationship between health professionals and journalists is not easy. Certain distrust and the use of different languages can be major obstacles.
- Journalists need accessibility to informants; Good sources who agree to collaborate in a timely manner and are able to express themselves clearly, impartially

and independently based on best scientific evidence.

3.-SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

- Food, nutrition and health claims are strictly regulated. A new framework based on scientific evidence is required, transparent, published online, including a register of approved and rejected claims in Europe. The focus has moved from an emphasis on security (now with a very high level) to an emphasis on nutrition - health. The consumer can rely more but needs to be more and better informed to adopt wise decisions.
- It is necessary that journalists, in addition to health professionals, are suited with adequate knowledge to identify the bases, the sources of scientific information and other criteria to verify this kind of information, are able to access scientific evidence and put it in perspective.
- It is also necessary to consult the legislative sources and the regulations, both state and the European Union level.

4.- INFORMATION, EDUCATION AND HABITS OF CITIZENS

- Citizens have the right to health. It is necessary to promote citizen training to enable for critical reading and active learning.
- It is necessary to foster the development of sufficient skills in citizens using the media and the Internet for information on health issues, to be able to identify sources of verified information.
- Health journalism can follow a model of service journalism to help citizens.
- Chefs are opinion leaders, trend leaders and even celebrities in some cases, but they are not always adequately qualified to be leaders in consumer education.

- It is necessary to inform and train citizens in food and health issues since primary education. Teachers require continuing education in this subject, including also the education of taste and development of culinary skills.

5.- HEALTH JOURNALISM - CONSUMER INFORMATION

- There is a need for communication professionals prepared to be able to identify appropriate sources, verify information, select, classify and work it in the context of health journalism. Health journalism is data and evidence journalism, but also requires being able to attract attention and interest of the audience.
- When it comes to information of any kind on food products that consumers should be familiar with, the Administration should be involved and lead this communication.
- EFSA in the European Union and Agencies of Consumer Affairs, Food Safety and Nutrition, such as AECOSAN, through their scientific committees, consultants and communication offices play a key role in this regard.
- Scientific societies and public or private institutions that have ethics and / or scientific committees have mechanisms of supervision and control of the messages broadcasted on their behalf; so that when a professional speaks on behalf of them, represents the entire group, generating a source of credibility.

6.- COMMUNICATION 2.0

- New information channels are opened uncensored, based on interaction and participation.
- Immediacy and convenience make sometimes use information that is not veri-

fied, skipping the basic rule of the health communication process: go to the sources and whenever possible verify the information.

- Both the involvement of readers and internet users, as well as participation in social networks contribute to generate opinion and raise questions. Sometimes traditional media echo these interactions and conversations on social networks and internet based on the number of followers, but not due to the quality of the information they generate.
- It is necessary that citizens and professionals can use criteria for identifying reliable sources.

7.- NEW TECHNOLOGIES, E-HEALTH, M-HEALTH

- Apps are supporting tools for providing care and nutrition education which are increasingly used, with good development prospects and potential contribution in the health sector.
- It is essential that the contents of health apps are backed by independent scientific societies.
- Food and gastronomy are increasingly frequent themes in applications for smartphones and tablets (apps).
- It is necessary that doctors and health professionals are involved as apps prescribers aimed to support care or as health education tools.
- While these tools could be very helpful in practice, there is lack of scientific evidence on their effectiveness in the field of food and nutrition interventions.
- The discussion on ethics and responsibility remains open in science, journalism and new technologies.

8.- ETHICS IN SCIENCE AND COMMUNICATION

- It is necessary that the collaboration of public-private sector is based on professional and scientific ethics as well as transparency.
- Private funding is not synonymous with research and communication of poor quality or vice versa.
- It is imperative objective assessment of the quality of design and methodology of research studies without prejudice or judgments a priori.
- Reference research should be that published in scientific journals provided with monitoring and supervising mechanisms through anonymous peer review.

In summary, information on food and health in traditional media and new communication channels can be highly effective tools for health literacy of citizens. Better training for information professionals in the areas of food, health and methodological processes will greatly facilitate opinion models and more operational recommendations.

It would be desirable to reach a collaborative support among communication and health professionals to encourage informed and responsible decisions in the population as a fundamental principle of Community Nutrition practice.

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