

Corves. Perini



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
TWIN CITIES

Laboratory of Physiological Hygiene
School of Public Health
Stadium Gate 27
611 Beacon Street S.E.
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455

August 31, 1981

Ms. Pat Perini, KERA-TV
Public Broadcasting System Video
475 L'Enfant Plaza S.W.
Washington DC 20024

Re: National Health Quiz

Dear Ms. Perini:

I recently reviewed the National Health Quiz with the idea of using it in a large Minnesota community education campaign. I proffer my unsolicited advice and reactions on viewing it, from the memo to my staff:

"With a few exceptions this is the worst conceivable production. It is hard to explain how it could be so bad, not knowing anything about its development. My only speculation is that the principal scientific advisor was a person who has long popularized one health hazard appraisal system. Presumably he is interested in information on risk appraisal, numerical scoring, etc., and not in the prevention message, in motivation, or in the intervention strategies involved in health communications. This is the only explanation I can imagine for such an unfortunate production, clearly done without expertise in scientific or communications aspects. My specific comments follow:

"The introduction was too long and gave far too much credence and pitch toward technology. Their serious message was that the responsibility has now shifted from the medical professional to the individual. This is not our message. It is shifted to the individual, and to the family, and to the community, not to the poor, weak individual alone. It tried to cover too much with heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes. It too much promoted the Indianapolis Prospective Medicine Group. It had too much 'computer gook' in it and very little science and no motivational aspects at all. It started out with an extremely complicated test of general knowledge and personal risk which actually dealt with adding and subtracting decimals! Even for people who were able to do this, their instructions were totally confusing. Every so often they would indicate to 'give yourself ten points for this correct answer,' and nowhere told you whether to add it or subtract it from the total. Actually they didn't use those points in the example of the actor struggling to compute his own total.

"Can you imagine that the food choices for 'individuals concerned about their cholesterol' would be pizza, number one, and roast beef sandwich, number two. Unbelievable!

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"The only thing good about the quiz was the three general classes of blood pressure, cholesterol, tobacco, exercise, family history categories and so forth, which were reasonable. The scoring for exercise had much too fine a discriminatory point, e.g., the choice was between one flight of stairs ten times a day or ten flights of stairs once a day, that sort of thing. Totally confusing and really didn't get across the message about stressing the circulation. Their classification of 'heavy physical activity' was actually anyone who walked a mile or more, three times a week or more. That is heavy activity?"

"The actor was a grossly obese, personally miserable, professional actor who stuffed his face, drank beer, smoked cigarettes, and sat and watched TV and made deprecating or hopeless gestures throughout. All the examples of people who should have a concern for cholesterol were also grossly obese, a totally misleading message. I can imagine that there might be a slightly more popular appeal, at least at the outset, by the presence of three well-known actors and a lead into the story by the grossly obese slob who is the principal character. But I would be interested in your opinion, and any survey information available about the responses of the audience as to what kind of impact it had on 'Everyman.'

"It should be withdrawn from the market for bad science, misleading counsel, and wretched communications."

Sincerely,



Henry Blackburn, M.D.
Professor and Director

HB:mbt

P. S. This was an "internal memo," accounting for the frank tone. Sorry. Regards. HB.