

# Organizing for Risk Communication: Response Informs Preparation for Outbreaks

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# Disclaimer

❖ *The findings and conclusions in this presentation have not been formally disseminated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nor any agency of any co-author, and should not be construed to represent any agency determination or policy.*



# Take Away

## “What do you mean ‘theory’? This is an emergency!”

- ❖ Practical applications for risk communication theory
- ❖ Factors contributing to effective communication in standard and catastrophic emergencies
- ❖ Organizing principles to transition communication organizations to emergency response status
- ❖ Methods of influencing leaders' communication responses during a crisis



# Chronology of an Outbreak Panama, 2006

September 2006						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
U.S. Federal Holidays are <b>Red</b>					1	2
3	<b>4</b> Labor Day	5	6	7	8	9
10 Grandparent's Day	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	<b>20</b>	21	22	23 Fall Begins
24	25	26	27	28	29	<b>30</b>

← <http://www.Printfree.com> →

October 2006						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>1</b>	2	<b>3</b>	4	5	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
8	<b>9</b> Columbus Day Thanksgiving Canada	10	11	<b>12</b>	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
<b>22</b>	23	24	25	26	27	28
<b>29</b> Daylight Savings Ends	30	<b>31</b> Halloween				

← <http://www.Printfree.com> →



# Panama Canal Referendum

## October 22, 2006



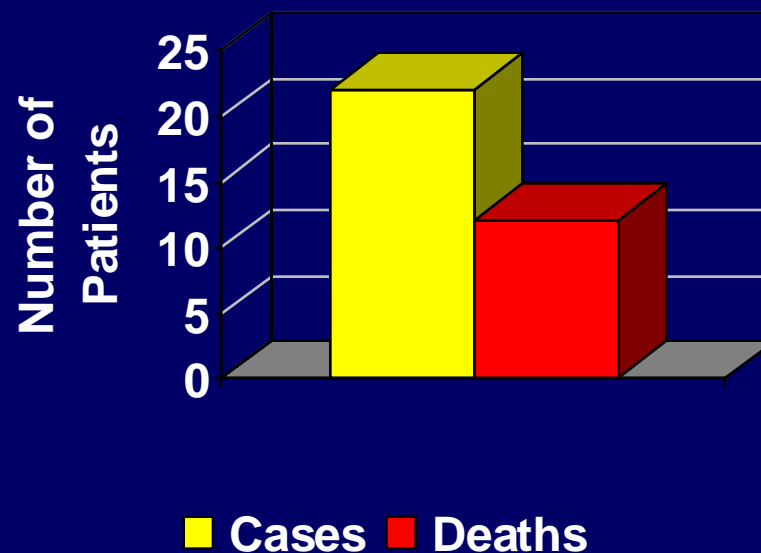
# Sunday, October 1, 2006

## “Mystery Illness”



*Arnulfo Hospital Complex,  
Caja de Seguro Social*

Status on 10/2/2006



# What Your Publics Expect

- ❖ Facts to protect them and their families
- ❖ Ability to make well-informed decisions with good information
- ❖ Active, participatory role in response and recovery
- ❖ Good stewardship of public resources
- ❖ Return to normal



# Risk Communication: Basic Tenets

- ❖ Outrage
- ❖ Trust
- ❖ Effects of stress
- ❖ Impact of emotional status  
on information retention





# Risk Communication Models

- ❖ Risk perception model
- ❖ Mental noise model
- ❖ Negative dominance model
- ❖ Trust determination model

*Covello, et al, Journal of Urban Health, 2001*



# Risk Perception Model: Understanding Outrage

- ❖ Risk = Hazard + Outrage
  - ❖ Peter Sandman
  - ❖ [www.petersandman.com](http://www.petersandman.com)
- ❖ Magnitude of risk = Statistics + Perceived Control
  - ❖ Fischhoff, et al, 1981
- ❖ “The risks that kill you are not necessarily the risks that anger and frighten you.” *Sandman, 1987*



# Risk Perception Model

**More Accepted**

**Voluntary**

**Individual control**

**Clear benefit**

**Equal distribution**

**Statistical**

**Confidence in the source**

**Familiar**

**Adults**

**Less Accepted**

**Imposed**

**External control**

**No perceptible benefit**

**Unequal distribution**

**Catastrophic**

**No confidence in the source**

**Exotic**

**Children**

*Adapted from National Research Council. 1989. Improving Risk Communication. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.*



# Mental Noise Model: Stress Affects Information Processing

- ❖ Impact of stress on attention (Covello)
  - ❖ High stress conditions: people lose 80 – 90% of what they hear
  - ❖ Scientific facts account for less than 5%
- ❖ Effect if emotion on information seeking (Turner, et al, 2006)
  - ❖ Greater emotion = less information retention



[www.centerforriskcommunication.com](http://www.centerforriskcommunication.com)

[www.comm.riskcenter.umd.edu](http://www.comm.riskcenter.umd.edu)



# Negative Dominance Model: Negatives Outweigh Positives

- ❖ MINSA news release, October 3, 2006:
  - ❖ Primarily affecting patients over age 60 who are diabetic or have renal problems
  - ❖ 15 people have died to date
  - ❖ If you experience symptoms, go to the nearest health care center
  - ❖ Do not self-medicate
  - ❖ If you have a regular doctor's appointment, keep it



# Trust Determination Model: Understanding Credibility

- ❖ Credibility =  
trust + expertise
- ❖ Influences on credibility
  - ❖ Perceptions of  
knowledge and  
expertise
  - ❖ Perceptions of  
openness and honesty
  - ❖ Perceptions of concern  
and caring



# Saturday, October 7, 2006

## Centro de Operaciones Conjuntos



# Oficina de Comunicación Social Structure

## ❖ Administrative units

- ❖ Information
- ❖ Public Relations
- ❖ Protocol
- ❖ Publicity and Marketing
- ❖ Production

## ❖ Office objectives

- ❖ Divulge relevant and significant actions related to providing health services in order to heighten public awareness of the work of the Ministry
- ❖ Assist other units in incorporating communication in health interventions to help achieve desired health outcomes





# Monday, October 9, 2006

## Tópicas para consideración

- ❖ Consistent approach to communication
- ❖ Support for key communication functions
  - ❖ News analysis
  - ❖ Internet
  - ❖ Link to health care professionals
  - ❖ Public education and information
- ❖ Use multiple channels for dissemination



# Wednesday, October 11, 2006

## “I wish . . .”

- ❖ Acknowledgment of emotional toll

- ❖ “Sé que hay mucha ansiedad, muchas dudas, mucha confusión y falta de credibilidad (...)

Estoy consciente de esa angustia de los familiares y de los panameños, pero le pedimos que crean que este es el procedimiento usual.”

- ❖ Añadió que espera qu se pueda terminar esto “ojalá que esta semana,” pero que no quiere ser irresponsable en dar una fecha “y que no cumplamos con la misma.”



# Structuring the Communication Response

- ❖ Include principle communicator in all phases of strategy development
- ❖ Let go of non-emergency communication functions
- ❖ Cross-train communication staff before the event
- ❖ Elevate media monitoring and message correlation
- ❖ Establish a theoretical basis that can be explained simply and quickly



