|  |
| --- |
| **Knowledge isn’t power: Mass media campaigns and obesity prevention** |
| **Background/Objectives**  Mass media campaigns, a popular strategy in obesity prevention, often focus on increasing awareness and knowledge in the belief that this will lead to behaviour change. This presentation considers whether knowledge really does empower people to change their behaviour.  **Methods**  We conducted a systematic search and review of mass media campaigns targeting obesity and related behaviours. We reviewed campaigns, including any grey literature reports, rather than reviewing individual studies, extracting information on the design and implementation of the campaigns, including whether they were part of comprehensive strategies or stand-alone campaigns. We also extracted any formative or process evaluation information that provided insights into knowledge and behaviour change and the short- and long-term impacts.  **Results**  We identified 15 campaigns of relevance to our review, almost all of which were stand-alone campaigns. Almost all campaigns specifically targeted increased knowledge or awareness of the consequences of poor diet, low physical activity, or excessive weight gain, or the benefits of healthy eating, physical activity, and maintenance of a healthy weight. There was an implicit belief in these campaigns that increases in knowledge would lead to behaviour change, following a hierarchy of effects. However, while their evaluations found good evidence that campaigns could increase proximal outcomes like awareness and knowledge, there was limited evidence of longer-term behaviour change. Where some formative or process evaluation had been undertaken, participants found behaviour change hard even when they were aware of the consequences, knew the benefits of changing, and recognised opportunities to make such changes.  **Discussion**  Our findings indicate that, contrary to popular belief, knowledge does not equal the power to change behaviour. While there is good evidence that campaigns can increase awareness and knowledge, the lack of evidence for concomitant behaviour change is suggestive of other barriers that impinge upon an individual’s ability to make the expected behaviour changes. This is not to say that campaigns have no role to play in addressing complex issues like obesity but rather than they should look to go beyond simple awareness-raising and knowledge-generation and address underlying and perhaps upstream causes. They should also not take place in a vacuum but rather as one component of a comprehensive strategy.  **Keywords**  Mass media campaigns, hierarchy of effects, empowerment, evaluation |