

Health Messages about Treatment and Prevention in Medical Dramas

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Objective

- Examines the relationship between viewing medical television dramas and actual health behaviors. Is there a difference between treatment and prevention behaviors?



Methods – Content Analysis

- 19 primetime television comedy and drama series (309 episodes)
- Aired United States, spring 2005
- 2 medical dramas – ER and House
- Measured the number and educational value of stories about:
 - cancer, heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, nutrition, exercise, and obesity
- For each story, determined what type of health information was given

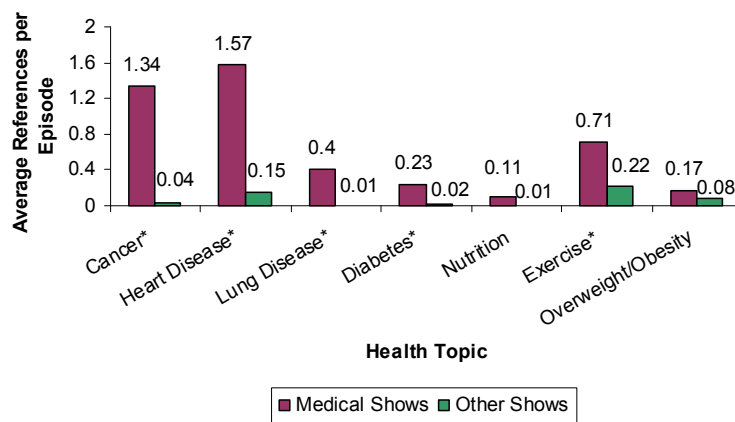


Methods – National Survey

- National random survey
- Administered online
- 1,517 respondents
 - Panel recruitment rate: ~75%
- Key Variables:
 - which tv shows they regularly viewed
 - media exposure to specific health topics
 - health behaviors



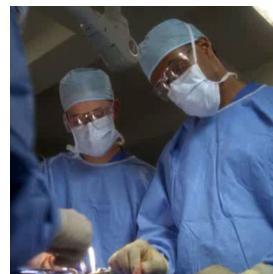
Results - Figure 1. Average Number of References to Health Issues per Episode for Medical (N = 35) and for Other Shows (N = 274)



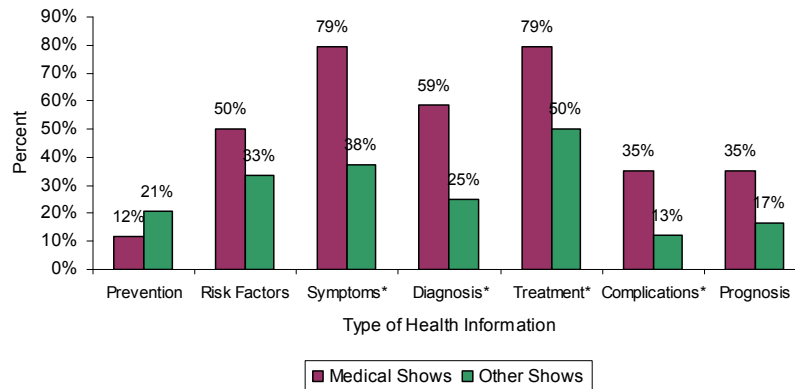
*t-test $p < 0.05$.

Results

- More references to health topics occurred on medical than other shows.
- Additionally, the storylines on the medical dramas had significantly higher educational value than did those of other types of television series.



Results - Figure 2. Type of Health Information Stories for Medical (N = 28) and for Other Shows (N = 20)



*Chi-square $p < 0.05$.

Results - Table 1. Factors Associated with Health Topic Exposure by the Media

	Multivariate Linear Regression Beta Coefficients		
	Cancer	Heart Disease	Obesity / Overweight
Medical Show Viewing [†]	0.20**	0.18**	0.12*
Hours of Television Viewing	0.006**	0.005**	0.004**
Age	0.01**	0.01**	0.01**
Ethnicity (Reference is White, non-Hispanic)			
Black, non-Hispanic	0.20*	0.24*	0.10
Hispanic	0.33**	0.22*	0.16
Other	-0.18	-0.13	-0.20
Gender (Reference is Male)	0.11*	0.09	0.14*
<i>F</i> Value for Model	23.54	20.20	13.82
<i>p</i> Value	<0.0001	<0.0001	<0.0001

[†]The number of medical dramas that respondents report viewing at least two times a month.
* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Results - Table 2. Factors Associated with Health Behaviors



	Regression Coefficients				
	Try to Lose Weight	Exercise per Week	Servings of Fruit	Servings of Vegetables	Cigarettes Smoked
Medical Show Viewing [†]	0.42**	0.001	0.08	0.14*	0.67
Hours of Television Viewing	0.001	-0.004	-0.004*	-0.002	0.06**
Age	-0.01*	0.01**	0.01**	0.01**	-0.04
Ethnicity (Reference is White, non-Hispanic)					
Black, non-Hispanic	-0.35	-0.13	0.28*	0.02	-1.99
Hispanic	0.17	-0.21	0.49**	0.23	-3.99**
Other	0.17	0.56*	0.26	-0.14	1.65
Gender (Reference is Male)	0.68**	-0.03	0.22**	0.30**	-1.03

[†]The number of medical dramas that respondents report viewing at least two times a month.
* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Results



- Medical shows depicted more storylines about treatment than non-medical shows.
- Both medical and non-medical shows included more information about treatment than prevention.
- Watching medical dramas was associated with:
 - greater media exposure to health topics
 - the treatment behavior - attempting to lose weight
 - one prevention behavior - eating more vegetables
- Watching medical dramas did not relate to other prevention behaviors:
 - fruit consumed, exercise, and smoking



Conclusions

- Medical show viewing related to improvement in some health behaviors. It had a greater effect on behaviors related to treatment than those related to prevention.
- For entertainment education through medical shows to be effective, a greater emphasis must be placed on stories about prevention and the incorporation of strong theory.

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