


Risk and Health Communication on Worksite Wellness



Risk and Health Communication on Worksite Wellness

Keri K. Stephens | Associate Director, Center for Health Communication
Ph.D., MA Organizational Communication | BS Biochemistry
Associate Professor, The University of Texas at Austin

The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Health Communication
Moody College of Communication

@uthealthcomm
@keristephens

Why don't employees take advantage of the great health and wellness programs offered by our company?




In the US less than 20% of employees participate in programs offered by employers. *Mattke et al., 2013*

The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Health Communication
Moody College of Communication

@uthealthcomm
@keristephens

Workplace Health Promotion

- Considerable research in this area
 - HEB has made strides, yet still many employees do not consume enough fruits and vegetables
 - Studies suggest management support varies
 - Time for health and wellness at work?
 - The Society for Human Resource Management polled 3,490 HR professionals in the U.S. and showed a decline in workplace wellness programs and benefits to employees over the past 20 years – from 2016
 - Some employees suspicious of motives
 - Is it an insurance ploy or my health?



The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Health Communication
Moody College of Communication

@uthealthcomm
@keristephens

Why health & safety messages in workplaces?

- Organizations as health dissemination channels for reasons of reach, access, and metachannels
 - Past research: beauty shops, churches, workplaces
- Don't know why some of these are successful and some not*
- Perhaps relationships are the key



The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Health Communication
Moody College of Communication

@uthealthcomm
@keristephens

Research on Identification



The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Health Communication
Moody College of Communication

@uthealthcomm
@keristephens

My Research on Identification

- Organization-individual relationships matter
 - Social identity theory & Organizational identification
 - Newcomer study: prior exposure to organization matters
 - Active shooter emergency communication: relationships prior to urgent situation matter




For more information see Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Stephens & Dailey, 2012; Stephens et al. 2013 & 2014


The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Health Communication
Moody College of Communication

@uthealthcomm
@keristephens

Risk and Health Communication on Worksite Wellness

How does identification work with healthy heart information?

- Partnered with Austin Regional Clinic
- Experiment and Survey
 - Random assignment message from employer, clinic, or both
 - Recruited from waiting room
 - Represented over 80 employers
 - Measured health literacy level




The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Health Communication
Moody College of Communication

@uthealthcomm
@keristephens

What we found

- Relationship variables (identification) work along with message attitude to affect health message persuasion
- This also matters when trying to get people to share information with coworkers
- Health literacy
 - Higher health literacy, **less likely to share** the information



For more information see Stephens et al. 2013 & 2014; Crook et al., 2016

The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Health Communication
Moody College of Communication

@uthealthcomm
@keristephens

What is the deal with social media?

- Another experiment
- Skin cancer information this time
- Participants exposed to a Facebook health message presented by their university:
 - Had most positive message attitude
 - Had higher health knowledge
 - Felt less overloaded




For more information see Stephens et al., 2013

The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Health Communication
Moody College of Communication

@uthealthcomm
@keristephens

Tentative Conclusions

- High levels of Identification:
 - Can make a health campaign more persuasive
 - Make people more willing to share info with coworkers
 - Can buffer overload
- So... it helps for organizations to have engaged employees who feel a part of the organization




The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Health Communication
Moody College of Communication

@uthealthcomm
@keristephens

Noteworthy Wellness, Health, & Safety Programs

- Google** (varies by location)
- Café options – prices vary
- Bring your dog to work
- Onsite health & fitness & care
- Stand-up desks
- Community Gardens



The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Health Communication
Moody College of Communication


12 @uthealthcomm
@keristephens

Risk and Health Communication on Worksite Wellness

AT&T (varies by location)

mHealth products

- Diabetes management (comprehensive)
- Drive mode app
- Emergency services



The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Health Communication
Moody College of Communication

13 @uthealthcomm @keristephens

5 Success Facilitators



- 1) Strong communication with employees & mgmt.
- 2) Opportunities for employee engagement
- 3) Multilevel leadership support
- 4) Utilization of relationships & resources already available
- 5) Continuous program assessment (often lacking)

For more information see *Matkke et al. 2013 RAND Study*

The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Health Communication
Moody College of Communication

14 @uthealthcomm @keristephens

Sharing Most Successful in this Room

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Health Communication
Moody College of Communication

15 @uthealthcomm @keristephens

So what about health apps?



- They are everywhere
- Safety apps are growing in popularity
- Very hard to know if they change behavior
 - Limited evaluation
- UT's wearables data is too early to tell
- My dream – evidence-based mobile app development lab

The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Health Communication
Moody College of Communication

16 @uthealthcomm @keristephens

Future Research Ideas



Could you attract healthy workers to join your organizations?

The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Health Communication
Moody College of Communication

17 @uthealthcomm @keristephens

My Challenge to This Room

- We need to evaluate these programs!
- Rand study says 40% are evaluated, but the quality is not clear
- Substantiates costs & benefits to all parties



The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Health Communication
Moody College of Communication

18 @uthealthcomm @keristephens

Risk and Health Communication on Worksite Wellness

