

Media Coverage of Cervical Cancer in Malawi: A National Sample of Newspapers and a Radio Station

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Abstract : Cancer of the cervix remains one of the high causes of death among Malawian women. Despite the government introduction of free screening services throughout the country, patronage still remains low and lack of knowledge high. Given the critical role mass media plays in relaying different information to the public including health and its influence on health behaviours, the study sought to analyse Malawi media coverage of the disease and its effectiveness. The findings of the study will help inform media advocacy directed at changing any coverage impeding the effective dissemination of cervical cancer message which consequently will help increase awareness and accessing of screening behaviours among women. A content analysis of 29 newspapers and promotional messages on cervical from a local radio station was conducted for the period from 2012 to 2015. Overall the results showed media coverage in terms of content and frequency increased for the four-year period. However, of concern was the quality of information both media presented to the public. The lapse in information provided means there is little education taking place through the media which could be contributing to the knowledge gap the women have thereby affecting their decision to screen. Also lack of adequate funding to media institutions and lack of collaboration between media institutions and stakeholders involved in the fight against the disease were noted as other contributing factors to low coverage of the disease. Designing messages that are not only informative and educative but also innovative may help increase awareness; improve the knowledge gap and potential adoption of preventive screening behaviour by Malawian women. Conversely, good communication between the media institutions and researchers involved in the fight against the disease through the channelling of new findings back to the public as well as increasing funding towards similar cause should be considered.

Keywords : cervical cancer, effectiveness, media coverage, screening

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