Speaking up for healthy communities

How to promote fluoride using the 4 C’s of effective communication

A presentation by Matt Jacob to oral health stakeholders in Concord, New Hampshire on February 7, 2020
Facts alone aren’t enough

1. Facts are often shared using **language** that many people cannot understand.

2. Facts **need context** to make them more relevant.

3. People tend to **filter the facts** to align with their existing beliefs or values.

Rethinking our approach

- It’s not just about **WHAT** we should communicate
- It’s also about **HOW** we communicate
The 4 C’s of effective communication

Communicate with clarity
1. Communicate with clarity

Write and talk to the public using plain language

If your initial screening evaluation indicates you have hypertension, you will be asked to participate in the second phase of this research investigation. The investigation aims to examine a new medication that may prevent cardiovascular disease.

(Source: Jessica Ridpath, “Got plain language? 5 tips for clear, engaging writing — even in research,” Group Health Research Institute, posted on Medium.com, Oct. 17, 2016)
1. Communicate with clarity

“… the average grade level for articles with a pro-fluoride focus was more difficult to read. … Tests to assess the ease with which a text can be read also indicated that the anti-fluoride materials were more readable.”
1. Communicate with clarity

• Speak in shorter sentences

Communicate with clarity

- Speak in **shorter sentences**
- Discard “**lazy words**” — words that take up space but aren’t necessary for understanding

In the future, we want to ensure that every family that happens to live in a low-income community in Anytown is truly able to have access to both foods and beverages that are healthy and nutritious.

1. Communicate with clarity

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We want to ensure that every low-income family in Anytown has access to healthy foods and drinks.

1. Communicate with clarity

- Speak in **shorter sentences**
- Discard "**lazy words**" — words that take up space but aren’t necessary for understanding
- Avoid **clinical or scientific terms** that many won’t understand

The fluoride ions that exist within fluoridated water interact with the enamel’s crystalline tooth structure that is called hydroxyapatite. The fluoride replaces the hydroxyapatite with fluorapatite, which helps it remineralize and resist tooth decay.

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The fluoride in tap water strengthens the tooth enamel by making it more resistant to acids within the mouth that can cause a cavity.

Communicate with context

The 4 C’s of effective communication
2. Communicate with context

Tell them what is at stake for their community
• Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease of children

• Kids with poor dental health are 3 times more likely to miss school days

• Adults with unhealthy or missing teeth are at a disadvantage when seeking jobs

2. Communicate with context

Fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in lakes, rivers, groundwater and the oceans.

(Sources: "Water Fluoridation Basics," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, reviewed on May 14, 2019, accessed at https://www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/basics/index.htm.)
2. Communicate with context

- **No single study** should drive our decisions about fluoridation.
- Why? Because fluoride has been the subject of **60,000+ research papers**.

(Source: Search for "fluoride" conducted on February 4, 2020 on the PubMed.gov online database, U.S. National Library of Medicine.)
2. Communicate with context

JENNIFER MEYER: By taking the fluoride out of the water supply, the tradeoff for that is children are going to experience one additional caries procedure per year at a ballpark of $300 more per child.

RACHEL MARTIN, HOST:

A little more than a decade ago, the city of Juneau, Alaska, became one of many American cities that stopped adding fluoride to its tap water. At the time, science predicted more cavities. That prediction has now proven true. From member station KTOO, Jeremy Hsieh reports.

JEREMY HSIEH, BYLINE: Jennifer Meyer is a public health researcher with a new study in the journal BMC Oral Health. She talks about tooth decay and cavities the way dentists do. She calls them caries. And after studying what happened in Juneau to children under 6, this is her takeaway.
Analogies help provide context

An analogy can improve the public’s understanding because:

✓ It relates to something they already know or do
✓ It can create a “mental picture”

“Analogies allow patients to hang difficult concepts onto information they already know rather than having to learn from scratch.”

– Terry S. Ruhl, MD
• Many states have laws restricting a person’s freedom to use their cell phone while driving a motor vehicle.

• Personal freedom is important—and so is the public’s health and safety. Sometimes, health and safety should take priority.

(Source: According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 16 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands prohibit all drivers from using handheld cell phones while driving. A total of 38 states ban all cell phone use by novice or teen drivers. And text-messaging by any driver is banned in 47 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Information retrieved from NCSL’s website on March 19, 2019)
Analogy: “Do we need both kinds of fluoride?”

• Air bags help to protect passengers in a car. But we still need to wear seatbelts.

• When it comes to protecting teeth, toothpaste and fluoridated water also work in different ways to prevent cavities. We need both.

(Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Community Water Fluoridation FAQs, accessed at https://www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/faq/community-water-fluoridation.html)
Analogy: “What about the warning on toothpaste?”

A lot of healthy products have similar warning labels.
“Throwing out [this federal process] when it has worked and is continuing to stop discriminatory changes is like throwing away an umbrella in a rainstorm because you’re not getting wet.”

– Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

(Source: Dissenting opinion in Shelby County, Alabama v. Holder, written by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, June 25, 2013.)
The 4 C’s of effective communication

Communicate with care
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“I’m a parent too so I can understand why reading that on your Facebook page made you feel concerned.

“Let me share what I know about that study and why I feel confident that fluoride is a safe way to protect teeth.”
3. Communicate with care

Don’t repeat the fear-priming terms that critics use

Letter to the Editor: fluoridation revolutionized dentistry

Regarding the letters about fluoride, I have proof it is good for dentistry and Oklahomans ("No studies link water fluoridation to better tooth decay rates," Feb. 22 and "End adding fluoride to the city's water supply," Feb. 14).

I am not in favor of chemicals of any kind, but I drank my city's water for more than 65 years, and it has had no negative effect on me or anyone I know.

In 1950, dentists in my city examined all preschool children for cavities and found rampant decay among many baby teeth too extensive to repair. Those early bloomers with permanent molars had decay almost beyond repair.

Two or three years later, our city put fluoride in the drinking water, and the teeth of these preschool children improved. There was less decay by 50

(Source: Dr. William J. Hardin, "Water fluoridation revolutionized dentistry with decay improvements," letter to the editor, Tulsa World, March 2019.)
3. Communicate with care

Don’t repeat the fear-priming terms that critics use

(\textit{Source}: D. Grace, letter to the editor of the Whanganui Chronicle, affiliated with the New Zealand Herald, June 14, 2018)
Communicate with collaboration

The 4 C’s of effective communication
4. Communicate with collaboration

Trusted voices in a town of 13,000 residents

“Close the circle and fluoridate the water. Support the new dental clinic as the last step for healthy smiles in Meadville.”

- Dick Astor, retired Superintendent of Conneaut School District

“For more information visit www.meadvillesmiles.com”

- Gary DeSantis, Self Employed Local Business Owner

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The 4 C’s of effective communication

1. Communicate with clarity
2. Communicate with context
3. Communicate with care
4. Communicate with collaboration
Some final thoughts to consider
The brain loves data
Facts and statistics are helpful and crucial to show people what is at stake

The heart loves people
Human beings—their stories, their challenges and their hopes for a better future
My name is Michael Dick. I am a lifelong Rutland city resident and a general dentist in my 41st year of practice here in Rutland. When I started practice 41 years ago, the decayed, missing and filled teeth in the population at large were unmanageable. My reception room played loud music to muffle the sound of children crying as their teeth were drilled, filled, redrilled and refilled.

Some of you may remember those days. Today is very different. Thanks to dental sealants, but particularly water fluoridation, more than 90 percent of my younger patients, including my own three children, turn age 18 without a filling in their heads.
Thanks for helping to educate our city about oral health and the need to invest more in prevention. We have a serious need here.

Part of my motivation is Billy Darrow. We were classmates from grades 1 to 6. Billy had terrible teeth. In grade 3, we had a substitute teacher who was easily angered — and it was Billy she picked on. I can still hear her hurtful words. I wish I could go back in time and just make her stop.
Americans always take care of each other. That love and unity held together the first pilgrims, it forged communities on the Great Plains, it inspired Clara Barton to found the Red Cross, and it keeps our nation thriving today.

Here tonight from the Florida panhandle is Tina Belcher. Her selfless generosity over 3 decades has made her known to all as “Mrs. Angel.” Every time a hurricane strikes, Mrs. Angel turns her tiny kitchen into a disaster relief center. On a single day after Hurricane Michael, she gave 476 people a warm meal. Mrs. Angel, your boundless heart inspires us all. Thank you. Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you very much.
Who uses stories to strengthen their impact?

I want to tell a story.

The year was 1881. After the tyranny of slavery, thousands of African Americans came to Atlanta hoping to build new lives, lives full of promise. The promise that they could fall in love and build homes and families. The promise that they could earn a wage that would support those families. The promise that they could plan for the future— for their own future and for the futures of their children and their grandchildren.
How to present yourself

“I’m here tonight to talk to you about fluoride and why adding it to water is a no-brainer.”
How to present yourself

“I’m pleased to be here tonight. I will share some information and answer your questions so you have the facts you need to make an informed decision.”
Visit the AmericanFluoridationSociety.org for a variety of fact sheets, this infographic and other resources.
Find helpful information and resources

Visit the ADA’s website to access Fluoridation Facts. It’s an excellent resource that thoroughly examines the many questions or claims that have been raised by critics about CWF:

https://www.ada.org/~/media/ADA/Files/Fluoridation_Facts.pdf
Questions? Comments?

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