

Youth Ambassadors for Cancer Prevention Workshop Report: Recommendations from Youth on Communicating the European Code Against Cancer

Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)

September 2015

WEBLINK:

http://europeancancerleagues.org/images/European_Code_Against_Cancer/YOUTH/Recommendations_from_Youth_on_Communicating_the_European_Code_Against_Cancer.pdf



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Executive Summary

The European Code Against Cancer is an initiative of the European Commission, which was first published in 1987. The purpose of the Code is to inform the general public of 12 evidence-based recommendations that they can follow in order to reduce their cancer risk. The most recent version of the Code was launched in October 2014.

As of 2015, the Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL) has received operation grant funding via the European Union's Third Programme Health Programme (2014-2020), which includes a specific mandate to disseminate the European Code Against Cancer in close collaboration with national and regional cancer leagues.

One of the key outputs from this work has been the establishment of a new initiative entitled the "Youth Ambassadors for cancer prevention" programme (hereafter, the "Youth Ambassadors" programme). The Youth Ambassadors programme seeks to gather highly motivated young people, aged 18-30, who are passionate about preventing cancer and want to share this enthusiasm with their peers across Europe.

To mark the 2015 edition of the "European Week Against Cancer" (held annually between 25 and 31 May) ECL organised the inaugural Youth Ambassadors workshop, focusing on the dissemination of the European Code Against Cancer.

The purpose of this workshop was to provide a forum in which the Youth Ambassadors could debate openly about what works, and what does not, when it comes to effective health communication approaches targeted at children, teenagers and young adults.

As a result of this workshop, the following recommendations for communicating the European Code Against cancer to young people were proposed:

- Recommendation 1 - **Be active! Harness social media**

In order to reach young people when disseminating the European Code Against Cancer, it is vital to make full use of the power of the social media, capitalising on physical and virtual social networks in the process. Social media communication must build and sustain a following by tweeting, re-tweeting, commenting and posting regularly. Therefore, establish a content plan mapping out clearly the materials and frequency of your activity.

- Recommendation 2 – **Be interactive! Use participatory tools**

The concept of 'gamification' is crucial, as this engenders a participatory approach, and can be an effective way to communicate health promotion messages, thereby encouraging behaviour change. Additionally, crowdsourcing for ideas and approaches can be an effective way to bring in youth to discuss health promotion and



cancer prevention on an equal footing, as opposed to being passive recipients of information.

- Recommendation 3 – **Be visual! Make the most of images**

Understand the power of the image and develop a marketing strategy. Brand identity is very important, and so the development of a distinctive logo is a good idea. Also, young people are increasingly using their social network profiles to share and view visual media, so don't be afraid to go beyond simple text when communicating the Code!

- Recommendation 4 – **Be social! Understand the power of peer pressure**

Make use of social networks to leverage peer pressure that can result in positive behavioural change. Learn from what people in other industries have achieved in this respect. Peer influence is both a key challenge and opportunity, especially amongst pre-teens, as it offers the chance to influence long-term habits. Therefore, communication of the Code to young people should emphasise group dynamics rather than focussing narrowly on individuals.

- Recommendation 5 – **Finally, beware of information overload!**

Today's youth are bombarded by information from online sources on a daily basis. Therefore, think carefully about how to stand out from the crowd and not succumb to the ephemeral nature of social media. Highlight the unique characteristics of the Code, focussing on the European dimension and reliability of the recommendations that are based on sound science.



Background

The European Code Against Cancer is an initiative of the European Commission, and was first published in 1987. The most recent version of the code was unveiled in October 2014 and is the 4th edition. The purpose of the Code is to inform the general public of 12 evidence-based recommendations that they can follow in order to reduce their cancer risk.

The messages contained within the Code are presented in a straightforward, user-friendly format that does not require advanced scientific knowledge. If these messages were to be followed by the general population, one third of all cancers would be prevented. The scientific analysis for the development of the Code was coordinated by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), with the support of numerous cancer control experts from across Europe.

As of 2015, the Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL) has received operation grant funding via the European Union's Third Programme Health Programme (2014-2020), which includes a specific mandate to disseminate the European Code Against Cancer in close collaboration with national and regional cancer leagues.

One of the key outputs from this work has been the establishment of a new initiative entitled the "Youth Ambassadors for cancer prevention" programme (hereafter, the "Youth Ambassadors" programme). The Youth Ambassadors programme seeks to gather highly motivated young people, aged 18-30, who are passionate about preventing cancer and want to share this enthusiasm with their peers across Europe.

As part of the celebrations and activities marking European Week Against Cancer 2015 (held annually between 25 and 31 May) the Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL) organised the inaugural Youth Ambassadors workshop, focusing on the dissemination of the newly revised European Code Against Cancer. This workshop was held under the auspices of the 4th Colorectal Cancer Days hosted by Dr Pavel Poc MEP in Brno, Czech Republic.

In order to select the participants, ECL issued a 'call for interest' seeking the active support of young people to disseminate the European Code Against Cancer to their peers. Those selected to participate subsequently assumed the role of a "Youth Ambassadors for Cancer Prevention."

The 'call for interest' was primarily distributed amongst a variety of youth networks, as members of such networks possess a demonstrable commitment to supporting the dissemination of educational tools and messages for young people.

ECL selected 14 Youth Ambassadors according to age (ambassadors must be aged between 18 and 30 years old), and country of residence (resident or studying within the European Region as defined by the WHO). The ambassadors were drawn from 9 EU Member States and 2 non EU Member States. Their profile was diverse and multi-disciplinary, covering PhD candidates, medical students and leaders of cancer patient youth groups.



AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The aim of the workshop was to gather enthusiastic and committed young people from across Europe to debate openly what does and does not work when it comes to effective health communication strategies targeted at children, teenagers and young adults.

The general objective was to arrive at a set of clear recommendations to be conscious of in order to achieve an effective communication of the European Code Against Cancer to young people.

The specific objectives of the workshop were:

- To gather innovative ideas and examples of good practice directly from the Youth Ambassadors, drawing on their experience of what works and what does not, when it comes to communicating health promotion messages to young people;
- To receive ambassadors' feedback on the examples of effective practice presented by invited speakers and experts during the workshop, emphasising the perspective of the ambassadors themselves as young people;
- To create a vibrant and participant-led network for the Youth Ambassadors, through which they can share information, coordinate activities and get to know each other;
- To forge strong connections between the networks with whom the ambassadors are affiliated and ECL, harnessing this collective in order to spread widely the messages of the European Code Against Cancer.

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

The agenda of the workshop was divided into several sub-topics, with the aim of connecting the presentations of guest speakers with the interventions of the Youth Ambassadors. The full agenda can be found in *annex 1* to this report.

Introduction

The workshop was opened by the distinguished Member of the European Parliament, **Dr Pavel Poc MEP**. Dr Poc is the founder and patron of the annual Colorectal Cancer Days, during which the Youth Ambassadors workshop took place. In addition, he is also a member of the MEPs Against Cancer interest group of the European Parliament.

The opening address was also extended to **Dr Iva Kurcovà**, the Vice-President of the League Against Cancer of Prague, who welcomed guests, and the Youth Ambassadors in particular, to the Czech Republic.



Dr Wendy Yared, ECL Director, outlined the mission and objectives of ECL, presenting a range of projects related to the dissemination of the European Code Against Cancer. Dr Yared stressed the importance of the work that needs to be done to improve the communication and dissemination of the code towards young people.

National Dissemination examples

National examples of dissemination of the European Code Against Cancer were presented to give a flavour of the many possible ways to communicate the Code. Dr Kurcovà treated the workshop as to a sneak-peek of a new information leaflet on the Code, which is designed to “produce a smile, not fear”.

Dr Luc Colemont focused his stimulating presentation on approaches towards harnessing social media for cancer prevention, highlighting numerous innovative examples by the ‘stop colon cancer’ foundation in Flanders, Belgium. Dr Colemont stressed the necessity of effective use of social media, but also acknowledged that we live in an era of information overload. This means that cancer prevention messages disseminated via social media must be skilfully designed and executed if they are to reach the target population.

Finally, **Dr Kinga Janik-Konieczna**, Maria Skłodowska Curie Memorial Cancer Centre and Institute of Oncology, showed how to spread cancer prevention messages among school-age pupils via an initiative to promote the European Code Against Cancer in Polish schools.

Targeting Age Groups

Turning specifically to the development of the European Code Against Cancer, **Dr Carolina Espina Garcia** (IARC), outlined how the 4th revision was achieved. Carolina explained both the scientific basis underpinning the messages of the Code, and the thinking behind the precise wording of each recommendation. How each message is phrased is of central importance, and so this must be borne in mind when communicating the Code.

The Youth Ambassadors then took to the floor to deliver their presentations, which covered methods for targeting migrant populations in cancer prevention campaigns, and reaching specific age groups within the youth population.

Physical Activity

During the next sub-topic, **Dr Eugenia Polizzi di Sorrentino** from the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission presented engaging ways to encourage young people to be physically active. Dr Polizzi di Sorrentino highlighted the influence of social networks in individual decision-making, as peers exert considerable influence on human behaviour. A pilot project was presented which demonstrated how peer pressure can affect the likelihood of individuals to participate in physical activity.



The Youth Ambassadors once again intervened following this presentation, focusing on the link between physical activity and the reduction of cancer risk, and strategies for behavioural change to increase the uptake of physical exercise in everyday life.

Pros and Cons of Communication Channels

The final sub-topic of the workshop concentrated on the strengths and weaknesses of various communications channels. **Tina Lipušček**, National Institute of Public Health of Slovenia, delivered a review of the cancer prevention communication campaign “I’m a Fan of Life”, which was implemented within the framework of the European Partnership for Action Against Cancer Joint Action (EPAAC). This presentation provided valuable insights into the many ways that digital tools can be used to communicate the code, including such things as mobile applications (apps), and online games embedded within social networks.

Interventions from the Youth Ambassadors for this section concentrated on a cost-benefit analysis of social media channels, and how this should be factored into cancer prevention campaigns aimed at reaching young people.

Additionally, a number of Youth Ambassadors shared their personal experience as cancer patients, underscoring the importance of providing accurate and accessible information about living with cancer. This testimony proves that cancer can occur at any age, and that young people must not be allowed to be complacent when it comes to cancer prevention.

The workshop was closed by Dr Yared with the message that this meeting marks the beginning of the Youth Ambassadors journey together, and that we must now all work together to spread the word about cancer prevention by proudly disseminating the European Code Against Cancer.

Conclusions

As a result of the presentations and discussions that took place during the workshop, the following recommendations for effective communication of the European Code Against Cancer to young people have been made:

- Recommendation 1 - **Be active! Harness social media**

In order to reach young people when disseminating the European Code Against Cancer, it is vital to make full use of the power of the social media, capitalising on physical and virtual social networks in the process. Social media communication must build and sustain a following by tweeting, re-tweeting, commenting and posting regularly. Therefore, establish a content plan mapping out clearly the materials and frequency of your activity.



- Recommendation 2 – **Be interactive! Use participatory tools**

The concept of ‘gamification’ is crucial, as this engenders a participatory approach, and can be an effective way to communicate health promotion messages, thereby encouraging behaviour change. Additionally, crowdsourcing for ideas and approaches can be an effective way to bring in youth to discuss health promotion and cancer prevention on an equal footing, as opposed to being passive recipients of information.

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- Recommendation 4 – **Be social! Understand the power of peer pressure**

Make use of social networks to leverage peer pressure that can result in positive behavioural change. Learn from what people in other industries have achieved in this respect. Peer influence is both a key challenge and opportunity, especially amongst pre-teens, as it offers the chance to influence long-term habits. Therefore, communication of the Code to young people should emphasise group dynamics rather than focussing narrowly on individuals.

- Recommendation 5 – **Finally, beware of information overload!**

Today’s youth are bombarded by information from online sources on a daily basis. Therefore, think carefully about how to stand out from the crowd and not succumb to the ephemeral nature of social media. Highlight the unique characteristics of the Code, focussing on the European dimension and reliability of the recommendations that are based on sound science.

The Youth Ambassadors will meet again for the second annual workshop during the summer of 2016.



Annex 1: Agenda

12:00 Registration and Lunch

13:00 **Welcome and introductions Welcome from Colorectal Cancer Days Organisers**

Dr Pavel Poc MEP

Welcome from local League Against Cancer

Dr Iva Kurcovà, Vice President, League Against Cancer Prague

Introduction to the Youth Ambassador concept

Dr Wendy Yared, Director, ECL

13:30 **Introduction to the workshop**

David Ritchie, Senior Cancer Control Officer, ECL

Participant profiles

Julie Perain, Stagiaire, ECL

13:50 **Section 1: National Dissemination Ideas and Examples**

Good practice examples from the Czech Republic

Dr Iva Kurcovà, League Against Cancer Prague

Good practice examples from Flanders

Dr Luc Colemont, Stop Darmkanker Foundation, Flanders

Good practice examples from Poland

Dr Kinga Janik-Koncewicz, Department of Epidemiology, Cancer Centre and Institute of Oncology



14:20 Section 2: Targeting Age Groups

European Code Against Cancer: overview

Dr Carolina Espina Garcia, International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC): video connection

How to best reach the immigrant population to communicate cancer prevention

Deependra Singh, Youth Ambassador, Finland/Nepal

How to reach children (under 12)

Wienke Voß, Youth Ambassador, Germany

How to reach adolescents (age 12+), young adults (17+)

Karina Kopriva, Youth Ambassador, Romania

15:10 Q&A

15:20 Break

15:35 Section 3: Physical Activity

Physical activity among children and peer-based incentives: results of a European Commission project

Dr Eugenia Polizzi di Sorrentino, Joint Research Centre, European Commission

How does physical activity reduces the risk of developing cancer?

Helena Vučković, Youth Ambassador, Croatia

How to increase physical activity in people everyday life

Mari Heikkinen, Youth Ambassador, Finland



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16:15 Section 4: Pros and Cons of Communication Channels

Social Media and EU Joint Actions on Cancer

Tina Lipušček, CanCon Joint Action, National Institute of Public Health, Slovenia

The pros and cons of communication channels in health promotion

Jelena Proskurina, Youth Ambassador, Latvia

YouCan organisation and communication strategies

Lyndsey Connolly, Caoimhe O'Neill Forde, Youth Ambassadors, Ireland

16:55 **Conclusions and Next Steps**



Annex 2: Youth Ambassadors – participants list

<i>Name</i>	<i>Affiliation</i>	<i>Country</i>
Andrija Ban	Dental Students Association in Zagreb (USDM)	Croatia
Mariami Beridze	Youth for Public Health	Republic of Georgia
Lyndsey Connolly	YouCan (Affiliated with the Irish Cancer Society)	Republic of Ireland
Lukas Galkus	Lithuanian Medical Students' Association (LiMSA), Alcohol Policy Youth Network (APYN)	Lithuania
Mari Heikkinen	Savonia University of Applied Sciences	Finland
Karina Kopriva	Youth Cancer Europe - Dialogue and Cooperation Platform for young people with cancer, a project of the Little People Association Romania	Romania
Even Landrö	ACTIVE - Sobriety, Friendship and Peace	Sweden
Caoimhe O'Neill Forde	YouCan (Affiliated with the Irish Cancer Society)	Republic of Ireland
Jelena Proskurina	ACTIVE - Sobriety, Friendship and Peace	Latvia
Janet Raycheva	Association of Medical Students in Bulgaria (AMSB)	Bulgaria
Deependra Singh	Finnish Cancer Registry and University of Tampere	Finland
Miljana Stojanovska	Macedonian Medical Students Association	Republic of Macedonia
Wienke Voß	Schleswig-Holsteinische Krebsgesellschaft e.V	Germany
Helena Vučković	Dental Students Association in Zagreb (USDM)	Croatia

