



EHFG 2011: FRIENDS AND FAMILY AS RESPONSIBLE AS HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS FOR PERSONAL HEALTH, GLOBAL SURVEY FINDS

People who are informed and proactive about their health tend to distance themselves from those with unhealthy habits, potentially missing opportunities to spread good health, according to the Edelman Health Barometer, presented today at the European Health Forum Gastein.

Bad Hofgastein, October 6, 2011 Globally, people believe that friends and family have as much responsibility for their personal health as their health care providers, according to the Edelman Health Barometer 2011 which was presented today at the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG). After themselves, nearly half (43%) of respondents believe that their friends and family have the most impact on their health, and more than a third (36%) believe friends and family have the most impact on personal nutrition.

Data also show that people who model a healthier lifestyle fail to connect actively with others who may benefit from their example, knowledge and support. Nearly one third of people (31%) – predominantly those with healthier behaviours – tend to distance themselves from friends who engage in unhealthy behaviours. But an even larger proportion of the global public (44%) does not factor health into their social interactions, and this group tends to have less healthy behaviour, consume less health information and is least likely to sustain healthy behaviour change when they try.

The intensely social nature of health influence was a major theme of global findings from the over 15,000-person, 12-country survey. “These findings present a challenging public health dilemma but also a wake-up call for everyone that whether we mean to or not, we are influencing health in all spheres of our lives,” said Nancy Turett, Global President, Health, Edelman. “Health – good and bad -- is communicable, and it is the responsibility of every citizen, especially those of us with leadership roles in any sector or industry, to recognize and act on this.”

Intention-action gap

The survey reveals an “action gap” between the desire to be healthier and the ability to change. Over half of the global public engages in at least one negative health behaviour, such as poor nutrition, lack of exercise or tobacco use. Though 62 percent of respondents said they tried to change a negative health behaviour, half of those people failed, primarily because of addiction/dependency and a lack of enjoyment or immediate reward. A lack of ongoing support, from friends, family or other resources, also contributed to an inability to make healthy changes stick.

“Individuals have a powerful influence not just over their own health but also those around them,” said Nick Fahy, Former Head of the Health Information Unit, Health and Consumers

DG, European Commission, and Senior Health Policy Advisor to Edelman. "We must be aware of the impact that we can have. Just as poor health choices can be spread through social networks, so can good ones."

According to the study, digital tools can be leveraged to support health-positive behaviours. Fifty-one percent of respondents said they turn to digital sources such as social networks for information when making health decisions, and while only 20 percent of the public is currently using tools, devices and apps to manage or track their own health, 68 percent of those who do say these technologies have helped improve their health.

An imperative and opportunity for institutions

When asked about the impact of business and government on personal health, respondents said both are having the least positive impact when compared to individuals, family and friends, and non-governmental organizations.

Globally, 82 percent of respondents believe it is important for business to improve and maintain the health of the public – yet only 32 percent said business is currently doing a good job. People want business to engage in health in a number of specific ways, including through educating the public, innovation, and improving the health of employees and their communities.

The EHFG is the most important conference on health care policy in the EU. This year it attracted more than 600 decision-makers from 45 countries for discussions on the latest developments in health care policy.

EHFG-Breakfast-Workshop 1: "Consumer insights in health". 6 October 2011

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