

**COMM 26501: Health Communication**  
**Professor Lisa Waite**  
**Kent State University**

**TEXTBOOK:**

DuPre, A. (2009). *Communicating about health: Current issues and perspectives* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

There is a growing awareness that communication not only affects but is intertwined with issues of health and medicine. This is true on a personal, intimate level in the way patients and caregivers interact in the examination and hospital room. It is also true on an organizational level in that policies and community relations affect the way health care is provided and the way people feel about the providers. It is also evident in media campaigns that seek to educate people about health. At every level, the importance of health communication is extraordinary, but so are the challenges. People who understand communication are in an important place to help, and their services are increasingly in demand. Communication skills are important for professional caregivers, but that is not all. Health communication specialists work (a) in hospital education departments, teaching medical professionals to communicate more effectively, (b) in public relations, marketing, and human resource departments, (c) in patient satisfaction and patient advocacy programs, (d) in health care administration, (e) in media organizations covering health issues, (f) in nonprofit organizations, and (g) in organizations that educate the public and support public policy and research.

This is not strictly a lecture course. In keeping with the team learning approach, I believe the classroom should be a dynamic place of discovery and growth. Therefore, instead of listening passively, you will spend the majority of class time taking part in learning activities, experimenting with new ideas, developing skills, and working with your classmates to analyze ethical dilemmas in health care.

This course is designed to help you understand how the health industry operates and what role you might play in it. My philosophy is that, to really understand any component of the industry, you must understand how the components work together and what factors have shaped (and continue to shape) the industry.

To accomplish this, we will develop the ability to:

- Describe the history of medicine and health care
- Knowledgeably discuss current issues in health care
- Analyze patient–caregiver communication
- Engage in informed dialogue about ethical issues in health communication
- Describe patients’ and caregivers’ perspectives
- Define the role of social support in maintaining health and coping with illness
- Identify and discuss the types of diversity among patients and caregivers
- Describe cultural viewpoints about health

- Analyze and describe organizational issues in health communication (management, public relations, marketing, human resources, crisis management, and so on)
- Identify media images about health and their influence on communication
- Comment knowledgeably on health crisis communication and health care reform options
- Identify the key steps in planning, implementing, and assessing health promotion campaigns

You will demonstrate proficiency of these skills by:

- Performing well on exams
- Taking part in class discussions
- Researching and writing about an aspect of health communication that interests you
- Taking part in a campus-based team project related to health communication

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

**1. Mini-Research Report on a Health Communication Issue (100 points).** Choose a topic in health communication that interests you and investigate it further. Your goal is to synthesize current research about this topic. Your 4-5 page paper must be based on at least three trustworthy, primary research reports. (You may use additional sources as well, but be careful not to generalize from data in news reports, isolated incidents, case studies, and so on.)

**2. Health Campaign Project Overview (homework).** As a team, write and submit a one-page description of your project by the deadline. As a team, determine your goals, objectives, and action plan. Anyone who reads this should have a clear idea of what your project involves, and why you chose this project. For the final portfolio, you will amend this overview to include what you have accomplished.

**3. Health Campaign Portfolio (200 points).** Each student will prepare a portfolio as evidence of the health campaign project. This is a tremendous ‘take-a-way’ to demonstrate your competence to future employers. Details forthcoming.

**4. Team Project Oral Presentation (100 points).** Each team will create a 20-minute presentation describing your project. The objective is to help the class learn from your experiences. Details forthcoming.

**5. Midterm** 100 points (chapters 1-6) **& final exam** 100 points (7-12) *Chapters 13 & 14 are evaluated via the health campaign.*

**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:**

**Week 1**

Welcome

- Introduction
- Review syllabus
- Review course requirements

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Chapter 1, Introduction

- Definition of health communication
- Medical models
- Current Issues

Self-Assessment: Applying Communication Principles

**Week 2**

Chapter 2, History & Current Issues

- History of health care
- Managed care

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Chapter 3, Patient–Caregiver Communication

- Patient–caregiver communication
- Physician-centered communication
- Collaborative communication
- Environmental restructuring
- Telemedicine
- Therapeutic Privilege
- Activity: ‘The Waiting Room’

**Week 3**

Chapter 13, Planning Health Promotion

Campaigns

- Knowledge gap hypothesis
- Ethical implications of health campaigns
- Defining the situation and potential benefits
- Analyzing and segmenting the audience
- Establishing campaign goals and objectives
- Selecting channels of communication
- Narrowcasting

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Chapter 14, Designing and Implementing Health Campaigns

- Theories of behavior change
- Critical-cultural perspective
- Designing campaign messages
- Piloting and implementing
- Evaluating and maintaining a campaign
- Effects of peer pressure

Team Project

- Discuss project & form teams
- Review assignment and forms

**Note to students:** These chapters are being addressed early in the semester to provide you with ample time to form teams and prepare for this assignment.

**Week 4**

Chapter 4, Caregivers' Perspective

- Medical education
- Satisfaction/burnout
- Managing medical mistakes
- Privacy

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Work on team project proposal

Team Project

Project idea (one per team)

As a team, write and submit a one-page description of your project to include goals, objectives, action plan. Anyone who reads this should have a clear idea of what your project involves, and why you chose this project.

**Week 5**

'Sicko' film & discussion Team Project

One-page project overview due

Chapter 5, Patients' Perspective

- Socialization
- Satisfaction
- Cooperation/consent
- Illness and identity
- Informed consent

Activities

- Role play
- Informed consent / AZT
- Multimedia resources

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Chapter 6, Diversity Among Patients

- Health literacy
- Social status, gender, sexual orientation, race, language, disabilities, age

Individual list due

- Typed reference list of three trustworthy, primary sources

**Week 6**

Chapter 7, Social Support & exam review

- Social Support
- Coping
- Lay caregiving
- Dying a good death

- Over-supporting
- Right-to-die issue

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Midterm Exam ch. 1-6

Chapter 8, Cultural Conceptions of Health & Illness

- Asian and Pacific Island culture
- Hispanic culture
- Arab/Islamic culture
- Native American culture
- Health as organic condition or harmony
- Health as stigma or curse
- Health as expanded consciousness
- Patient–caregiver roles
- Viagra
- Paternalism

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Activity:

- Viagra & the media
- ‘The Latino Paradox’

**Week 8**

Chapter 9, Culture and Diversity in Health Organizations

- Organizational culture
- Historical patterns
- Professional diversity
- Holistic therapies
- Conflict management
- Affirmative Action

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Activity

Affirmative Action Debate

**Week 9**

Chapter 10, Leadership and Teamwork

- Redefining bureaucratic structures
- Six Sigma
- Interdisciplinary teams
- Health care advertising
- Attaining service excellence

Homework: bring a healthcare ad from a newspaper, magazine, or internet to discuss next class.

**Week 10**

Chapter 11, Health Images in the Media

- Tobacco
- Alcohol
- Standards of beauty

- Media literacy
- Is Hollywood responsible?

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Activity: discussion of advertisements

**Week 11**

Chapter 12, Public Health Crises and Health Care Promotion

- Public health
- Health crisis case studies
- Strategies for risk and crisis communication
- Health care reform

**Week 12**

Work on portfolios

Individual conferences

Final exam study guide

**Week 13**

Rehearsals

**Week 14**

Team Project Presentations Final health campaign portfolios due

Final Exam ch 7-13