

## WHAT IS ADVOCACY ACCORDING TO PUBLIC HEALTH?

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### Abstract

Advocacy is explained as pleading in support (of a cause or somebody) and advocate means a person who speaks in favour of somebody or something. It is not very easy to make people participate in the decision making process. It needs a planned, disciplinary and long term effort. During this time, it is necessary to obey the principles and rules. A message is a form of expressed information which is disseminated for a specific purpose. A well-formulated message can be the basis for a successful advocacy campaign. One of the most important tools that are used in advocacy is media. Another tool is website planning that should be established by the professionals. Also lobbying is one of the methods which are used by advocates. Lobbying is a group of methods and techniques which will be able to influence public opinion and decision making mechanisms through the lobbyist's or organization's gains. Consequently, both in general and in advocate action's resources are limited so they are used carefully. The purpose of this paper is to elaborate on the details of advocacy according to public health perspective.

**Key words:** Advocacy, Public Health, Coalition, Message, Media, Lobbying

### 1. WHAT IS ADVOCACY

According to Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary of Current English, advocacy is explained as pleading in support (of a cause or somebody) and advocate means person who speaks in favour of somebody or something<sup>1</sup>.

In another dictionary, advocacy is the act of advocating support, the act of pleading for. In the same dictionary, advocate is explained as the one who publicly supports or urges<sup>2,3</sup>. However, nowadays, there are also definitions which handle advocacy in political and social views. One of the most frequently used is that advocacy is the process which effects the policies. In Bond Guidance Notes Series 3, advocacy is the process to use the knowledge strategically in order to change the policy that will affect the life of disadvantageous people who are not at the management<sup>4</sup>.

Advocates are the ones who are gathered by the meaning of vision and mission<sup>6</sup>. The advocates and the volunteer organizations that they form aim to make some revolutions in economical, political, social and cultural structure to reach the ideal world that they define as the necessity of their existence. Their main purpose is to create the social transformation that removes this problem<sup>5</sup>.

### 2. PRINCIPLES OF ADVOCACY

Advocates and their organizations should encourage the decision makers about making laws and execution of them by taking their attention to the case they defend about the politics which approach positively to their case.

Social justice advocates can play a role in helping amplify other people's voices, as well as organizing people so they become their own confident advocates<sup>6</sup>. They lead people to define their problems and aims and determine their strategies based on their needs and wants. In other words, they make them realize their power and

use it to affect the decision making process. Nevertheless, it is not too easy to make people participate in the decision making process. It needs a planned, disciplinary and long term effort.

To reach the highest point for advocacy, a set of core values that is believed to create an innovate learning organization is identified. The acronym- THE RAMP- symbolically means reaching greater heights.

- a. **Transparency:** Members both the leaders and the others that take place in social justice advocacy should be transparent in relationships both with each other and with the other organizations especially with the decision makers.
- b. **Hope:** Advocates and the other people they work with should believe that people's advocacy efforts will create change.
- c. **Exchange:** In advocacy movements exchanging the missions among peers and colleagues should be done. Everyone has something to offer and share with the others.
- d. **Respect:** In advocacy organizations people should respect for members and leaders alike, given in one-on-one relationships and in group settings.
- e. **Affirmation** of people doing the work. This means not only the leaders, but also those who provide administrative and logistical support, and those who are relatively inexperienced should be supported.
- f. **Modeling,** People taking place in advocacy organizations should be setting a good example. They should act in the way they talk.
- g. **Pragmatism.** Actions are based on long-term and short-term objectives that are realistic, achievable, and practical <sup>6</sup>.

### **3. WHAT IS THE STRATEGY OF ADVOCACY AND HOW IS IT PLANNED**

When embarking on a journey, planning the trip and directing its course is necessary. Travellers move forward, consulting maps or other sources that inform them about what is ahead, and keeping a fixed point- a mountain peak, the stars, or a compass heading- a reference for guidance along the way. Advocates especially the initiators of action should develop strategies to protect and improve their goals to take them to the target like travellers. From this point strategy planning in advocacy is just like trip planning<sup>6</sup>.

When framing an overall approach to strategy planning we introduce the steps that orient advocates to the process of navigating among the tools, resources and knowledge that they have at hand. The first questions to be answered by any advocacy effort should be what do we want? What are our goals? The objectives for the advocacy campaigns should be multi-dimensional. Small changes occur simultaneously, ultimately building towards long term, transformative change. If the changes take long time, people can lose their motivation. Advocates should focus on the problem at local, national and international level. To build a strategy about a subject, there must be integrated approach and general view. In other words, structure of the subject should be defined. While defining these, some questions can be asked, such as:

Who are we? Why are we doing this work? What are our values? What perspectives and identities do we bring to our work? Do we represent someone besides ourselves? If so, what is our accountability to these people? Do we have good relationship with the decision makers? What are our sources of legitimacy and credibility? What are our sources of power? What risks do we face<sup>6</sup>?

The other group of questions can be arranged as: What are our sources? How can we use our sources effectively? What do we need to improve? From the answers

of these questions, deficiencies should be determined and completed. How can we start? Who can give this to us? By this way, the people and the institutions that are needed to activate should be determined. By gathering appropriate people, short term objectives should be determined and in other to reach long term objectives, a strong foundation should be formed <sup>6</sup>.

Most of the time, advocates think that they are not the dominant side in the relationship between the decision maker about the power relation. There are myths about power in ever bodies' minds <sup>6</sup>. For instance; the other side/ they have the power etc. Nevertheless, power is a concept that can change. It can be infinite, unregistered shared or limited. Moreover power balances are also dynamic and can change abruptly (immediately). It is not guaranteed that the person/ institute that have power today will have it tomorrow. Advocates know from their experiences that power is not given, but it will be taken at the end of a certain resistance and struggle.

The other two questions that should be thought while improving the strategy are; Where are we? Where are going to? Advocacy is mostly based on creating awareness. The place and the situation that the advocates are in should be assessed and then the next step should be chosen. These assessments should be made frequently along the whole process and by considering the next step.

Advocates often struggle with questions of effectiveness. They think about "How do they plan better; how do they more powerfully deliver their message?" In seeking to be more effective, the answer may lie not in "how", but in "who". The person who has the leadership role should have some certain properties. The leader should be visionary, strategy expert who can estimate people, experienced, and outside sparkplug.

#### **4. RESEARCH FOR ADVOCACY**

Advocates should have a good knowledge about the subjects they defend. In some cases, it is not easy to reach enough information and data. Moreover, in some cases, information and data are hidden intentionally. For this reason, one of the best ways the advocates have enough information and data is doing research for advocacy. The difference between the researches for advocacy and the other researches is that these researches are not only done for the purpose of taking the attention to the problem and supporting it but also for the purpose of changing the policies and laws about the subject.

While planning the research for advocacy, there are some questions that must be kept in mind. These are: What is the problem? What policy goal does this research address? Is this research appropriate for the policy goal? Will the research be done in time to meet the policy objectives? How will the results be used to advocate for that policy goal? Is there another (cheaper, easier, more effective) way to get the same results<sup>6</sup>?

##### **Types of Research for Advocacy:**

**Opinion Polls/Surveys:** Opinion polls can be useful to show the general public support and knowledge. Generally the objective is to gain the public support for the actions that is done against the problem and to activate the ones that make the laws. If the public is not supportive, then it is the advocates' task to educate people about the importance of the subject.

**Economic research:** The researches like, cigarette consumption per capita and its costs, health care costs for the cigarette-attributed illnesses are the examples

of economics researches. These researches are used to convince the public and politicians.

**Qualitative Research:** To determine the quotes and interesting stories from the real life and to show them to the public by the help of media are some examples for the qualitative researches. The story of a person who has lost his leg and then his job because of tobacco consumption can be a good example for it.

At the end of all researches, the report that will be prepared and presented should be short and include charts and graphs that illustrate the findings. While explaining the results the attractive sentences should be used in the report. It should focus on the subject and objective rather than give detailed information. Where, how, to whom presentation will be made is as important as preparation of research report. First of all the results of research which was prepared at the end of the research should be directly presented to the policy makers. While presenting the report, one of most frequently used and beneficial method is to hold a press conference by inviting well-known people in the field covered by research. The members of the press should be invited to come to the meeting to discuss the results. A press release and fax which explain the importance of the subject and research should be written to various media<sup>6</sup>.

## **5. THE ORGANIZATION OF ADVOCACY AND ESTABLISHING COALITIONS**

In the advocacy movement, advocacy coalitions have an important role. Coalition means strength not only in numbers and diversity but also in cohesion and solidarity. In coalition, workload and resources are shared and a micro-model of a just, decent society can be created. For this reason, every advocacy movement should give importance to find partners/ form coalitions and should struggle.

Coalitions exist for joint actions. To reach a specific goal, members invest significant resources, share decision making power and coordinate their strategies, messages and action plans. In addition to a common interest, coalition members must share a high level of trust.

As starting the coalition, each group should discuss these questions and share the answers with other groups that they form coalition. These questions are: Who are we? Who do we each represent? Why do we care about the issue? Why do we need or want to join the coalition? What is our objective? What is our perspective-individual and organizational? What are our resources? What can we do? What are our strengths and limits? In the same way, before building a coalition, these questions should also be answered: What are the properties, leadership, type of management of the stakeholders? How is the infrastructure of the organization? Does the organization have a sound financial base? What are the skills and capacities of the organization? Does the organization have productive relationship with other non governmental organizations, the decision makers and the media<sup>6</sup>?

Diversity is one of the important component of coalition power and the ability to form society power. While forming a coalition, it should be asked why instead of with whom. Considering the strategy of the organization, coalition can be formed with a right group. Advocates should be ready to spend more time, power and be flexible. It should be known that if the perspective is more different, development of strategy and analysis and movement plan will be much better. There are some important components of a workable coalition. Those are it should have clear, significant certain structure. An open communication and unified platform should be created. Movement should have measurable objectives and frequent assessments should be made to reach the objectives<sup>6</sup>.

However, the differences between members and organizations can cause problems in coalition. Sharing decision making power can cause problems. Working in coalition can cause loss of time and energy. The coalition can grow up to an extent that it does not function. The expenditure can be more than the profit. In such cases, coalition should be assessed again.

## **6. FORMATION AND GIVING MESSAGES**

One of the most important tools that are used in advocacy is messages. The first step of formulation of a message is seeking the answer of these questions: What do people need to hear? All of the messages that are wanted to be given should be established on the same true basis and also presented in a way that will persuade the target audience. Who do they need to hear it from? As much as content of the message, who gives the message is important. The messages and information that are given by specialist about that matter are more effective.

No media advocacy campaign can succeed without a powerful, coherent message, the message that is at the same time logically persuasive, morally authoritative, and capable of evoking passion. The message must speak at one and at the same time to the brain and to the heart.

Messages bring clarity and focus to specific issues and campaigns and allow advocacy practitioners to frame public debate on their terms. A good message is simple, to the point, easy to remember and repeated frequently.

People need to hear a message again and again to retain it. Simple repetition also builds comfort and familiarity with ideas and issues over time. Using the same message repeatedly promotes retention more effectively than using multiple messages.

There are basic principles of a message development. These are:

- A message should be easy to grasp, short and uncluttered.
- Frame of the message should be put around the issue: Audience attention should be shifted through perspective of the message by highlighting specific aspects of an issue, such as who is responsible for the cause and who offers possible solutions<sup>7</sup> (Former chairman of one of the largest international tobacco companies in the world, told that he didn't smoke cigarette and he confesses that smoking is harmful<sup>8</sup>).

- Target audience should be known: Their values, beliefs, feelings, needs and priorities.

- The audience should be invited to "fill in the blank" and thus to take ownership of the message.

A solution should be presented (People are more responsive if solutions are the focus versus focusing on the problem's cause)<sup>7</sup>. Also instead of negative messages if positive messages are used it would be more appropriate and effective.

The messages which were used by public health advocates are most important for constitution of public opinion and policies. Emotionally evocative symbols—more than logic—frame the public policy issues for the broad public audience. The industries understand this all too well. For example, advertising and marketing symbolism of tobacco industry is designed to associate smoking with positive personal values, while its public policy propaganda is designed to associate smoking with positive public values<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, a tobacco company organized "no smoking" campaign in a country<sup>10</sup>. In fact, the situation is different. A decade ago, a former of one of them sneered that his company had built its fortune by marketing to "the young, poor, black, and stupid"<sup>11</sup>.

Tobacco Companies threw on the market “light” and “ultra light” cigarettes when people began to become conscious about harms of cigarette in 1950-60s. In the following years consumption of the cigarettes like these increased extremely<sup>12</sup>. In recent years “organic”, “natural” and “additive-free” cigarettes are increasingly popular, appealing to health-conscious addicted consumers in much the same way as “light” cigarettes did a few decades ago<sup>13</sup>. In fact, tests on some brands indicate that higher amounts of tar and nicotine than the ones in the “regular” cigarettes under the smoking-machine are taken to fit the situation into a "realistic smoking condition"<sup>12, 13</sup>.

The advocates should overcome all these problems and should form messages that will make the public perceive smoking and another else as a health problem. This is difficult but it can be achieved. In one-year follow-up study aimed to evaluate the maintenance of the abstinence from smoking among the participants in International "Quit and Win" Campaign 2002 in Turkey, the one month abstinence and one year complete abstinence rate was 73.5 % and 44.7 %<sup>14</sup>.

Advocates often develop a media campaign around a core message, which typically includes: Their analysis of a problem, the problem's cause, whom they hold responsible for solving the problem, the proposed solution and the action that they ask others to take in support of the solution.

Some messages may appeal more strongly to specific audience than others. A message developed with a specific audience in mind is called a tailored message. Tailored messages can be developed for voters in specific districts, for politicians, or for other constituent demographics.

After the message was formulated, the second important question is “How do we get them to hear it? ”. There are a lot of ways of it. This may be a talk which is face to face or reaching the community with the way of media. While the working goes on, “Is target audience true?” and “Do messages reach them?” should be controlled.

## **7. MAKING ADVOCACY IN THE MEDIA**

First of all, advocates should gather information about the operating policies, audience, deadlines, and key personnel of the local media especially that might be interested in covering their story and also note who is writing or reporting about their issue and where.

Basic principles of media advocacy should be flexible, spontaneous, and creative. Advocates should seize the initiative; stay focused on the issues; make sure the media know and trust them; choose best spokesperson (especially who is intelligent and merry).

If the media is concerned with the issue, that should be significant, interesting and new; stand out and be “newsworthy.” Furthermore, advocates should search continuously for new pegs, angles and hooks for their issue.

For increasing the chance for media of the issue; it should be timely. Advocates should localize the issue (broad national issues may be important but try to use local examples and statistics instead of, or in addition to these are may be more interesting for community), explain how the issue affects real people, accent the human interest angle (personal stories), demonstrate support for their issue by quoting or having someone of prominence in their community or state as a spokesperson and always make sure that the sources are credible and the information is correct and consistent with the facts.

Advocates don't have to wait for media to come to them. If they have a new take on their issue, it is worthwhile to call (or write) a columnist or reporter (or talk show host) and pitch their idea. They get to know who would be likely to do a story covering these issues. They should explain concisely why their issue would make a good story or column right now -- why it is interesting, important, and timely.

Frame of press should be positive; negativity and defensiveness make message less appealing and identifiable. Advocates should present issue as pro-safety, pro-health, and pro-freedom from public hazards and death and speak on behalf of the "public," "citizens," and "community," not "supporters of specific action or legislation."

**News Releases:** News releases are short, clearly written accounts of an event, accomplishment, or report. Ideally, the 5 "W's" and an "H" -- who, what, when, where, why, and how -- should be covered in the first two paragraphs because this part is the most interesting part for editors.

In a new release the time should be put on the left, and organizational contacts on the right; use a headline, bold and centered, summarizing the contents of the release briefly so that journalists can decide immediately whether they are interested; make the story factual and accurate; use short words, short sentences, short paragraphs; use active verbs that move the reader forward and it should be no longer than a page and a half.

**Broadcast** facilitates the aim of attaining the target audience. At the first step of this, advocates should send a pitch letter to the program's producer introducing their organization, their spokesperson(s) and the issues that s/he can discuss which will interest the given audience. Before the interview, advocates should watch or tape several shows and study them for interviewing style, setting, and degree of audience participation; organize their information; writing a script if necessary to develop a strong lead point; practice giving responses in 30 to 60 seconds "sound bites" that can easily be quoted.

During the interview, advocate should answer questions honestly and clearly (if s/he doesn't know, s/he should say so.); use vivid language, examples, and statistics; keep the time frame of the interview in mind in order to ensure that all topics are covered and select two or three basic points or themes to stress and keep going back to them.

Before the interviewing with **print reporters**, advocate should learn as much as s/he can about interview that how long it will be and whether others are to be interviewed for the same article. During the interview, advocate should stop to think through the answers carefully; rephrase or clarify statements when necessary; provide background information that will set comments in context, rather than assuming that the reporter can do so and as much as possible and keep the reporter on her/his track. After the interview s/he should ask the reporter to check facts and quotations together<sup>7</sup>.

With the support of the EU, the Ministry of Health of Turkey has launched a campaign with using mass media, started on October 3, 2007, entitled "Bebeğim sağolsun" (Long Live My Baby) in order to reduce the ratio of maternal and neonatal mortalities. Mobile vehicles will pay visits to particular 15 cities, which are attached specific importance by the Ministry of Health. The cities are: İstanbul, İzmir, Ankara, Kayseri, Mersin, Şanlıurfa, Diyarbakır, Siirt, Van, Ağrı, Kars, Artvin, Erzurum, Muş, Elazığ. In the framework of the campaign, the objective is to raise awareness

amongst women of 15–49 age group, their spouses, families and next-of-kin about reducing maternal and neonatal mortality ratios<sup>15</sup>.

**The first step in any website planning** should be to determine who the target audience is and what the extend of it is. Its tone should be suitable for the target audience. This shouldn't be forgotten. The web site should be reviewed many times and should be designed in the most appropriate way.

The readers are already in information overload. Consequently, they are unlikely to read everything advocates present, no matter how important it is. So advocates should keep their key points prominent. Also, website should be brief. Unless advocates have a very specific audience, language should be simple, clear, consistent and universal.

While the technology level of the pages of the website should be tailored to the needs and desires of the target audience and no video or audio should be run more than 5 minutes without warning<sup>7</sup>.

## **8. LOBBYING**

Lobbying is one of the methods which is used by advocates. Lobbying is a group of methods and techniques which will be able to influence public opinion and decision making mechanisms through the lobbyist's or organization's gains<sup>16</sup>. Lobbying organizations or coalitions urge decision makers to take a specific action e.g., cast a vote, adopt a regulation, write an editorial.

Effective social justice lobbyists should identify strong supporters in elected bodies for the organization's objectives and appreciate their own limits<sup>7</sup>.

Public decision is a game within which a lot of actors play. There are a lot of actors, a lot of approaches and a lot of gains that are mostly adverse. Every actor wants final decision that is as close to her/his expectations as possible. So this requires coming to an agreement in an unavoidable way. The final conclusion is an average solution<sup>16</sup>.

Lobbyists should know about the legal and illegal processes. They should make all obscure procedures and practices of legislative bodies and government understandable for the people. Lobbyists should listen to others including the opposition to identify possible advantages (Sometimes a good idea or proposal gain a support in unexpected ways.).

Homework should be done very well while visiting a bureaucrat. The meeting should be started as positively as possible. Lobbyists should focus on one issue, keep the presentation short and focused and also know what they want to ask the decision maker and help the decision maker with information and support<sup>7</sup>. Decision makers always want to know more information. Lobbyists have this information; therefore they have the chance to bargain.

Briefly, the first rule of lobbying is the necessity of being ready to present something before taking something. Second, lobbying is communication. Third, lobbying is alliance. Fourth, lobbying is cocktail. Last point is; lobbying is a thing that should be spread to time. So, certainly a strategy is necessary to be successful<sup>16</sup>.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

In an ideal world, governments would always try to act in the best interest of the population, carefully weigh the effects of their policies and actions, and choose those most likely to contribute to the public good. In a more realistic scenario, NGOs and individuals encourage governments to act in the public interest, and plan their work so as to increase the chances of the government adopting positive policies and

programs<sup>6</sup>.

Moreover and mostly enforcements of the laws, takes more time than make laws. In most of the countries it has been observed that whereas the laws can change, the people do not change with the same speed. While doing advocacy, in which level the changes should be made, should be defined. 1. At political level; is the existing law or policy appropriate/ adequate for today's context? 2. At application level; can the existing written law or policy be implemented as it is planned? 3. At cultural level; do the people know that they have rights to take what they request from the system and to force them to get solutions<sup>6</sup>?

Both in general and advocate action's resources are restricted so they are used carefully. Therefore, resources have to be used with planning in detail. The key of a successful campaign is an action that sees the overall the situation and plans it. First of all, advocates should assess their particular situation, including the current reality, their sources of power and current capacity, and possible starting points for creating change. They should select achievable targets for getting started, then create an action plan, including how to use their resources, what capacities to build, and which actions, tactics, and tools to use and navigate the little victories, setbacks, compromises, unexpected opportunities, and uncertainties that line the road to the long-term change they want to achieve. As a result, all of these are necessary for a successful campaign<sup>7</sup>.

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