Health Promotion

Joh Chin Rossiter

Breast-feeding, the better option: getting the message across

An outline is given of the making and evaluation of a culture- and language-specific video for the promotion of breast-feeding among immigrant Vietnamese women in Australia.

In their own country, most Vietnamese women breast-feed their children for a prolonged period (1). However, the practice is significantly less common among Vietnamese women who have migrated to Western countries (2–7), where the majority bottle-feed and those who breast-feed wean their infants very early.

Vietnamese women’s infant-feeding practices appear to be shaped by their health beliefs, which are influenced by social, cultural and economic factors. When they migrate their health beliefs and practices change in response to the perceived culture of the host country. The switch to bottle-feeding in the new environment could lead to major health problems for both the women and their children.

With a view to encouraging immigrant Vietnamese women in Sydney to breast-feed, a culture-specific educational programme, including a 25-minute videotape entitled “The best for my baby”, has been produced. The purpose of the video is to promote breast-feeding among these women by:

- providing information on the benefits of the practice;
- offering culturally acceptable advice on infant-feeding practices, taking into account the women’s health beliefs;
- using an entertaining style to convey the right messages.

Creating a story

By means of questionnaires and interviews a study was conducted on the attitudes of 87 Vietnamese women living in Sydney towards infant-feeding practices before and after immigration. Most of the women had
had little education and could neither speak nor write English. Their knowledge about the benefits of breast-feeding was minimal, and they had deep-rooted cultural beliefs relating to postnatal ritual and dietary restriction. Under the social, cultural and economic influences of Australia, many of the women turned to bottle-feeding. They lacked family support and social networks, and harboured misconceptions about formula milk and the Australian way of feeding infants. It was clearly necessary to communicate with them through Vietnamese actors speaking their own language. Actors were selected for their appearance, age and personality.

A well-known female doctor in the Vietnamese community volunteered to participate in the video.

Once a basic script had been written a grant of $A 5000 (about US$ 3750) was obtained from a commercial source for the making of the video. A story line was developed with the assistance of final-year students in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Western Sydney, and the advice of a professional scriptwriter was sought. It took about three months to complete this process so that the message was delivered in an interesting and entertaining manner.

In the video, Linh, a young Vietnamese mother-to-be, emerges from a doctor's surgery, thinking about her conversation with the doctor and traditional postpartum rituals, dietary restriction, the comparative merits of breast- and formula-feeding, social support, and her perception of social expectations on infant-feeding practices in Australia. She discusses the matter with Vietnamese friends and eventually decides to breast-feed. The final scene shows her leaving the doctor’s surgery with her baby and her husband, content that she is providing her baby with the best possible food: her own milk.

**Video production**

Filming lasted three to four weeks and the locations included the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Sydney Opera House, the streets of Cabramatta, a Vietnamese household, a child care centre and a doctor's surgery. The highly motivated team working on the project consisted of actors, students serving as technical crew, the director, the author, the executive producer and a technical consultant. A further period of two to three weeks elapsed as a preliminary version was created from the best takes and music.

The video was shown to pregnant Vietnamese women, some of their husbands, health workers, an interpreter, research assistants, an ethnic liaison worker and the health educators at the antenatal clinics of three hospitals. Most of the pregnant women and health workers indicated that they enjoyed the video and music. Some women returned to watch the video a second time, accompanied by friends. Editorial changes were suggested, and thanks to further financial support from the same commercial source it was possible to engage a video production company to make additional improvements. English subtitles were incorporated for the benefit of English-speaking health educators. The final version was completed in November 1991.

---

It was necessary to communicate through Vietnamese actors speaking their own language.

The video is now available for public viewing in the library of the Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital and in that of the University of Western Sydney, Nepean. Copies can be obtained (price, A$ 5.00 including postage) from the
Communication Health and Education Research (CHER) Centre, Faculty of Health Studies, University of Western Sydney, Nepean.

The video has been distributed to the hospitals where the breast-feeding educational programme was conducted and evaluated. Its dissemination and use by Vietnamese women’s associations, migrant centres, high schools and health organizations are to be expected in the near future.

The programme increased the women’s knowledge and improved their attitude towards breast-feeding.

The programme demonstrated that health education can be presented in a culture- and language-specific video format to reach individuals and groups in various locations.

Acknowledgements

The production of the video was sponsored by Nestlé Australia. The work was partly supported by the Commonwealth Department of Health and the New South Wales Nurses’ Registration Board. Also gratefully acknowledged are the help and cooperation given by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Western Sydney, and by Dr H. Cohen, the students, actors and consultants who contributed to the production of the video, and Robyn Hopson who provided secretarial assistance.

References


