

SESSION HANDOUT

A. Name of speaker:

a. **Mary Easaw- John**

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National Heart Institute, Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA
AODA, Country Representative for Malaysia.**

B. Title of Presentation :

b. **"The Art and Science of Creating a Nutrition Story for the Media"**

Learning Objectives:

After the completion of this session, the audience will be able to:

1. **Be confident when delivering nutritional information in the most interesting manner to the general consumers through the media.**
2. **To formulate ideas from different angles for creative stories when interviewed for different segments of the audience.**
3. **Learn how to establish rapport and develop productive working relationships with the media.**

I. Introduction:

Nutrition knowledge has expanded through the years. An overwhelming volume of information constantly bombards the consumers with conflicting messages on food choices and diet related diseases. These conflicts challenge the dietitians to debunk some of the myths. As the public's interest in nutrition grows, the media's search for dietitian with stories and reports also grows. The important aspect is that as dietitians, we need to be confident when delivering nutritional information in the most interesting manner to the general consumer through the media. We need to pitch stories from different angles for creativity, establish rapport and develop productive working relationship with media

II. How did we arise to this challenge?

When approached by the media production company, we took the opportunity to promote healthy cooking for the multi cultural Malaysians in the Malay language. This breakfast programme was targeted for housewives and shift workers. The 30 segments were aimed at teaching Malaysians, ways to cook their favorite dishes with similar taste but reduced in fat and calories. These recipes used natural local spices and seasonings. Recipes such as curries were replaced with low fat milk instead of coconut milk, while fried foods were grilled.

We realized that we needed to put in time and effort to select those common recipes and modify them. The modified recipes were test-run to ensure taste acceptability. Nutrient analysis per serving was calculated to show reduction in calories and fat contents. Five recipes were shot each day at the studio for 6 continuous days. It was a real challenge to cook, present in the local language and smile while facing the camera. The management was supportive by providing resources such as manpower and testing the recipes in the department.

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To publicize the cooking program, a press conference was organized by the public relation department of the National Heart Institute (NHI). Journalists from different media were invited and the new healthy recipes were distributed. The press releases created much awareness and the programs were overwhelmed by nearly 2.5 million Malaysians, doubling the regular television viewers. We had numerous feedbacks from the general public and patients of the NHI. With each media interviews, we build up our confidence, improved our creativity and achieved strong creditability.

- In October 2005, The National Radio Station, Traxx FM contacted us to educate the public on healthier lifestyles in English. Topics for the show were based on current nutrition issues and presentation was to be done in a fun way. It will be aired on the 3rd Tuesdays of every month at 10.15 a.m. We based our creative talks on the calendar year according to the festivals, events and celebrations in Malaysia. The show is open for the listeners to phone in and ask questions.
- In January 2006, there was a debate on the eating habits of Malaysians on local Indian Muslim foods (known as *Mamak* Food) which was rated as high in calorie and fats and rumoured to be a major cause of stroke in the country. The Indian Muslim Food outlets are opened 24 hours and many Malaysians enjoy dining at these outlets. The local newspaper contacted us about the pros and cons of *Mamak* foods and on the issue. The dietitians of the institute decided to get specific information through tasting these *mamak* food, photographing and checking on the actual portions served at one of these outlets. We came up with the nutritional content of selected foods and released this information for the interviewed article published on the New Sunday Times. This article appeared on the front page of the newspaper and we received many positive feedbacks.
- Recently, the New Straits Times featured an article on the first Malaysian recipient for AODA, International Dietetic Network STAR Award. This was a double honor, being the first Asian, for this award recognizes leadership skills and for promoting nutrition and dietetics, locally and internationally as a country representative.

Conclusion

Building and maintaining productive working relationships with members of the media established us as valuable and reliable resources for the local media. As a result of our role with the media, we were contacted by local food industries and hotels for creating healthy recipes. We were invited to be judges for chef competitions. We served as food advisors for the local food industry and are key opinion leaders in workshops and conferences. The media boosted the dietetic profession and marketing nutrition in simple and practical approach added credibility to the profession that advertisement cannot buy.

The media is waiting eagerly for hot spicy nutri - news. The challenge is all yours!!!

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