

Benefits of TED Talks

I have been a fan of Technology, Entertainment and Design Talks (TED Talks) since their popularization a few years ago. Recently as outlined in the September commentary by Nicolle et al¹, the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Toronto in Ontario decided to transform its ordinary courses on the social determinants of health (SDOHs) into TED lectures, and I entirely support this initiative, as it is adapting to the gradual evolution of learning. Moreover, this institution of higher education is effectively informing medical doctors and allied health professionals, as well as entire communities, about SDOHs owing to the accessibility of these presentations. TED Talks require small amounts of time, are financially advantageous, and represent an excellent way to reach out to the members of society, thereby promoting active involvement in population health.

Usually such high-quality presentations or lectures on SDOHs are reserved for physicians and other health workers and are mainly given as conferences in overpriced symposiums. I believe transforming them into TED Talks is a great idea in terms of time because many health professionals are unable to attend day-long conferences. During residency, for instance, pagers are constantly beeping. Similarly, many nurses and physiotherapists barely have enough time in a day to accomplish all the tasks on their agendas. Concise presentations on SDOHs allow health professionals to acquire another perspective on health; that is, understanding that diseases might not stem entirely from faulty biological mechanisms. They learn to identify and examine societal factors, such as socioeconomic status, “education and literacy,” and “physical environments,” that might be contributing to conditions in which there are deviations from normality.¹

The introduction of TED lectures is also beneficial with regard to money, as the videorecordings are available online for free. Since when are high-quality presentations offered completely free of charge? Presenters, who are passionate experts, speak with such energy and momentum. Their enthusiasm is contagious! As a student, I occasionally watch TED Talks simply because they deliver thought-provoking ideas in an entertaining way. The recommendations given on the TED Talks website (www.ted.com/talks) are also useful, as they guide the audience toward other videos treating similar subjects, possibly offering contrasting perspectives. In terms of SDOH lectures offered by universities, many “institutions now offer open access to their intellectual property.”¹ Furthermore, there even exists the possibility of attending live TED Talks within one’s community. These independent TEDx events, which are often hosted by educational institutions, allow interested individuals to interact directly with the speakers

and to continue discussions after the presentations. Consequently, TED Talks, which are “freely available and accessible,” represent a new generation of optimal teaching methods.¹

“[T]echnological innovations [do] facilitate connection and communication,” as stated in the commentary.¹ TED Talks have an impressive overall outreach because they are open to everyone and thereby allow members of society to gain an understanding of social factors that influence their health. This knowledge of SDOHs confers upon them the necessary tools to take responsibility as a society and take collective action to help those who are most at risk. Additionally, the population would understand the many medical changes that are under way, especially the focus on primary care and its important role in identifying problems earlier and taking action to solve them, as well as in delivering preventive care. We cannot solely focus on the infinitely small biological structures making up the body’s internal environment, as the external environment, that is, society, definitely plays a role.

Nicolle and colleagues prove that efforts are currently being made to train health professionals, as well as the population in general, to effectively recognize social factors that affect health and illness.¹ Identification of this powerful link is a step forward in the comprehension of many states of illness, or deviation from social norms. Finally, SDOHs are without a doubt “ideas worth spreading”—and TED lectures, with their open nature, are the quintessential medium for communicating these ideas.

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Competing interests

None declared

Reference

1. Nicolle E, Britton E, Janakiram P, Robichaud PM. Using TED Talks to teach social determinants of health. Maximize the message with a modern medium. *Can Fam Physician* 2014;60:777-8 (Eng), 788-9 (Fr).

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