

10. MyHealth

Public Information and Communication

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Introduction

RCSI's academics, researchers and clinicians recognise their responsibility to share their knowledge and discoveries to empower people with information that leads them to better health. That commitment is supported at institutional level through the focus on Supporting Healthcare and Society in the Strategic Plan 2018-2022. RCSI MyHealth plays a vital role in supporting that plan and reflecting RCSI's commitment to UN SDG 3 (good health and wellbeing). Until March 2020, RCSI MyHealth took the form of in-person events, however, the onset of COVID-19 meant that this form of public engagement was no longer possible and a solution was required.

Initiative

The early days of the pandemic were framed with considerable public and media demand for trusted health information. For that reason, and notwithstanding the additional pressure on educators and researchers resulting from the pandemic, it was agreed that RCSI had a responsibility as a health sciences university to share knowledge and provide guidance to the public. This required a repositioning of the MyHealth format, themes, and promotion. A cross-institutional committee examined the challenges and opportunities and developed a plan that has resulted in MyHealth reaching a much larger audience than previously conceived.

Following engagement with all key stakeholders, the lecture series transitioned from live, in-person events to pre-recorded, virtual episodes. The first online episode was shared in August 2020. To ensure that events reached their target audience, a promotion campaign was built for each episode: direct emails being sent to the over 7,000 people on the MyHealth database and further promotion undertaken through targeted paid social campaigns. It was considered that engagement would be best facilitated by launching each video on a specific day. Furthermore, by moving the events online, it was now possible to make the episodes available to watch on an on-demand basis, further broadening the audience that these events could reach. Building on the success of RCSI MyHealth online, and the growing public appetite for health information from RCSI, it was then decided to launch the RCSI MyHealth podcast in 2022. Now each recorded episode is accessible in video form on YouTube and Facebook and as a podcast on all the streaming platforms. In 2021, to inform the development of events that meet the public need, RCSI commissioned Behaviour and Attitudes to undertake a health concerns survey. This survey of the MyHealth mailing list and RCSI staff identified that since the onset of the pandemic almost 1 in 5 respondents thought their general health had declined, while 1 in 4 thought their mental health had deteriorated. Cancer continued to be women's main health concern, followed by mental health, heart disease and weight. Positive health, women's health, mental health, immunity, obesity, heart disease, neurological disorders and cancer were the most popular topics that people wanted to see covered in future events. This research has informed the topics chosen for episodes since.

The success of RCSI MyHealth is dependent on the support of expert academics and researchers to get involved. Therefore, the communications team developed a package of supports to minimise the time demands on academics and researchers, to allow them engage with this important societal initiative. Their contribution is celebrated across internal communications channels, and messages of appreciation from senior management acknowledge their participation. Peer-to-peer encouragement has also played a key role, with those taking part going on to become real ambassadors for the RCSI MyHealth initiative.



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Outcome

The move to virtual delivery provided an opportunity to bring RCSI's expertise to a much larger audience. The in-person lectures attracted an average audience of 200-500 people. Since January 2022, eight episodes have aired, with 10,204 viewers. The newly launched podcast has had more than 1,000 listeners to date. The most popular episode to date focused on menopause. The panel comprised experts in the physical, physiological, and psychological areas associated with menopause. 2,150 registered for the episode in advance and 4,700 people watched it on YouTube.

The effort to encourage involvement has built an internal community of MyHealth champions who have been instrumental in its success. Potential future enhancements include expanding the membership of the RCSI MyHealth Committee to broaden the expertise base informing the series development, identifying topics that will resonate more with men and seeking further opportunities to leverage MyHealth as a platform to highlight areas of strategic importance to RCSI.

