

Committee: World Health Organization (WHO)

Issue: Eliminating Health Propaganda

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Position: President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear delegates of WHO,

My name is Mike Papakonstantinou, I am an IB1 student at Costeas Geitonas School and for the three days of the conference I will be serving as your President in the committee of the World Health Organization. I have plenty of experience with MUN, both as a delegate and as a Student Officer. MUN requires dedication and awareness of global affairs, in order for a delegate to be able to participate in the debate. Especially in such conditions, where the conference has to be held online, it is really important for all members of the house to keep their professionalism, their cool and to give extra effort for the procedure and cooperation during the conference. However, MUN is also about socializing and meeting new interesting people, and also to have some fun.

Now I would like to mention a few things about myself. I have been to 12 MUN conferences in Greece, I play basketball and I aspire to study Mechanical Engineering abroad.

If you have any problems with the topic, the procedure or the study guide, make sure to contact me at mikepapakonstantinou9@gmail.com.

See you at the conference everyone!

Best regards,

Mike Papakonstantinou

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

For one to understand the concept of health propaganda, we need to understand what is considered as propaganda in general terms. Propaganda is very similar to advertising; however, there are some important differences that distinguish the two. The most notable difference is that while advertising promotes a product or service, propaganda opposes the rival trend or product to prevent its consumption. The aggressive approach of propaganda is what makes it harmful for the integrity of diversity in the market or in our society in general. This is the main reason why propaganda, especially in healthcare needs to be eliminated.

Health propaganda is a rare phenomenon in the world; however, it exists and it has its impact, especially in times of a global pandemic. Health propaganda has many forms and is used from groups of people to oppose healthcare measures. It can cause great confusion in cases where a person needs information over a medical issue and is misinformed from people that support biased, misleading ideas that do not have any scientific explanation and are simply created to oppose conventional medicine. Another way that health propaganda was used in the past is to oppose foreign health country policies and public healthcare benefits, in order to advertise their own health system. As explained later, there are some major countries that use such methods to promote their public health and of course this has caused global commotion. Also, terrorist organizations have chosen to select a similar policy by publishing small videos that show the state-of-art medical technology they are equipped with. Such techniques have a great historical background that will be further explained later in the text.

Diplomatic relations lived through a crisis during the pandemic due to health propaganda accusations. More specifically, countries have accused other states of participating in international forums to judge the public health system of other fellow states and thus promote their own. This was a cause of a crisis in diplomatic relations with the pandemic recently.

Health propaganda is a global issue that has grown in the past year due to the social and economic complications caused from the COVID 19 pandemic. Its elimination is crucial to ensure cooperation between social groups around the globe on a small scale and Member States on a large scale. Propaganda has been and will continue to be a massive threat in our social lives and in our global economy if it is not eliminated. Its consequences have been massive in the past and in combination with the pandemic, misinformation and the negative effects of propaganda, it could be harmful to our integrity as a human race.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Propaganda

Propaganda is “the more or less systematic effort to manipulate other people’s beliefs, attitudes, or actions by means of symbols”. It is used to promote a trend, an idea or a service by downgrading other similar rival products or ideas, such as vaccines and the anti-vaccine movement that is a form of health propaganda.

Advocacy

Advocacy “is the activity of an individual or group to influence or support a particular cause or policy.” Many professionals and medicine advocates around the globe thrive to advise the people of the measures they should take during the pandemic. However, there are also groups that oppose these facts and try to influence others with no scientific presumptions.

Contemporary health

“A contemporary definition of health recognizes that disease and disability can and often do co-exist with wellness”. Contemporary health is becoming quite a trend in recent times and public health services that allow the patient to follow a contemporary health program are the most popular right now in the medicine market. However, it is a common cause of misinformation and propaganda.

Mass Media

Mass Media are “the different methods of giving information to a large number of people, e.g. newspapers, television, radio”. Mass media play a major part in the spreading of misinformation and health propaganda.

Opioids

Opioids “are a class of drugs naturally found in the opium plant that work in the brain to produce a variety of effects, including the relief of pain”. The opioid propaganda that took place in the United States of America is one of the largest cases of health propaganda ever recorded.



Figure 1: Example of a propaganda poster during the Soviet Union.

Pseudo-addiction

Pseudo-addiction “is a condition where a patient is experiencing severe pain, as a result of a chronic illness but the signs and symptoms of the illness are misunderstood”.

Visa

A visa “is an endorsement on a passport indicating that the holder is allowed to enter, leave, or stay for a specified period of time in a country”.

Misinformation

Misinformation “is false or inaccurate information especially that which is deliberately intended to deceive”.

Over The Counter (OTC) Products

Over The Counter (OTC) products are drugs that can be purchased without a prescription.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The issue of Public Health Advocacy and Education

Informing the public of the latest medical breakthroughs is always important and necessary so the patient can make the best choice for their condition based on their needs and their financial situation. It is also necessary for the public to be aware of how crucial respecting public health is and to be correctly educated from experts in the field. This is the main reason that most governments around the globe have the reassuring of public health and health education as one of their top priorities. Nevertheless, the state can never be certain of the proper education of all citizens as there are some cases that prove this to the fullest extent.

Health Advocacy and Education in schools

Especially in many states of the United States of America school health education and opportunities for advocacy are really a top priority. An example is the county of Maine where they offer education links and resources in order for the teachers to combine health education and academics with offering data, statistics and advice that is being provided by experts in health education. Also, school nurses have created movements for seminars and programs that take place in schools so that students can be informed about public health and how to take care of their hygiene. Such programs take place all around the globe and the European Union states work with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health of each of its member states to ensure that funds will be dedicated to the sufficient health education of both students and adults. The risk of misinformation or propaganda

phenomenon in such programs is very low since the government or a private company that cooperates with the government is responsible for such seminars or programs.

Health Advocacy and Education through Mass Media

Mass media are an easy and effective way to promote a campaign of any kind, whether that is an advertisement for a product or it is a campaign for the pandemic and what the citizens need to know about protecting themselves. However, there are also many unreliable sources and people who have certain opinions that are not based on scientific facts. This misinformation in social media causes many problems as people are not sufficiently educated in this field and do not trust conventional medicine. During the times of the pandemic, several high-profile sources and high-caliber news pages have dedicated their staff and research to inform the public through their social media accounts on all major platforms. This wave of information-sharing was named “social media infodemic” from the World Health Organization, as the news of the pandemic was spreading faster than the virus itself. According to Cornell University, where this infodemic was analyzed, low credibility sources were posting less about the pandemic in comparison with high credibility sources.

Historical Background of Health Propaganda

There have been several cases of health propaganda recorded in the recent past. They have had their impact on human society and the pharmaceutical market, as well as in the diplomatic relations of world superpowers.

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Health Care

The health project of the USSR is considered to be the first case of health propaganda ever recorded. The USSR was the first country to put health protection at the center of its priorities as they believed that they would differ from the capitalist West in this domain. Public healthcare was amongst the rights of citizenship, as the Soviet Man could invest towards the building of socialism. In the 1920s, the Soviet Union established a distinctive public health system that included both sufficient healthcare and proper health education towards its citizens. To be more specific, the Soviets were able to thrive towards a more human-centered approach to their healthcare. Through advertising campaigns, funded by the state government, and through information for personal hygiene towards the citizens of the Soviet Union, they successfully passed a mentality of a healthy lifestyle and insurance towards the people. This mechanism was so functional and inspirational, that it took something less than a decade for the West to study it as a result of some reports and research of European socialism figures Beatrice and Sidney Webb.

The case of Opioid Propaganda

As mentioned before, propaganda is any method that serves the spreading of ideas to undermine another product or cause. The scandal of the opioid market is a characteristic example of effective health propaganda. There was a claim that less than one percent of patients that followed an opioid based treatment would become addicted. This claim was advertised and repeated constantly after 2000, where opioids were becoming more and more popular amongst patients, that doctors accepted opioids as a sufficient treatment and started proposing such treatments for their patients. At the same time, the term ‘pseudo addiction’ was created to cover the negative effects of these treatments. Of course, this was a part of the propaganda.

The case of China during the COVID-19 Pandemic

China was the first country to experience the pandemic, as the source of the virus was reportedly the suburb of Wuhan. Despite the fact that they had to tackle this crisis on their own with no previous experience on such a deadly disease, several months later they were able to declare the country virus-free and the Chinese government made sure that everyone around the globe got to know the news. In combination with the introduction of 5G networks in China and the rest of the world during the pandemic, China presented evidence of why their public health system and their priorities concerning technology paid off. However, this exposure to the media by the Chinese government during the pandemic was not accepted from the US government. They issued a statement where they suggested that the UN forum for the pandemic was a stage for Chinese propaganda and to spread their achievements between the superpowers.

On January 5th, 2021, Chinese authorities blocked WHO experts from entering the country to investigate the origins of the virus, claiming a ‘misunderstanding in visa issuing’, with the organization being very disappointed by this. WHO had been preparing this mission since December of the previous year and had already communicated with the Chinese authorities for the deployment of this expert team. This unprecedented event obviously stalled the efforts of WHO for the investigation of the origin of the virus.

The World Health Organization has worked with the international community, with the United Nations and has made sure that every important Intel for the battle against the virus and that all information shared is appropriately filtered and available to the public through reliable sources.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

European Union (EU)

The European Union has taken evasive action during the pandemic for misinformation from unreliable sources. They have taken many measures in many

social media platforms to ensure that every citizen interested is informed sufficiently for the hygiene measures and for everything that one needs to be aware of to protect them. Working together with the World Health Organization and providing resources and in cooperation with the Member States, they have been able to keep every citizen up to date throughout the year. The European Union has also issued many statements and held many forums to combat health propaganda and possible ways to respond to it. They also have great experience in epidemics such as the Ebola outbreak and this knowledge counted to combat the consequences of COVID.

World Health Organization (WHO)

The World Health Organization has been one of the greatest factors in the COVID propaganda and has frequently been a target of criticism, as they have been accused of failing to establish leadership during these difficult times and of spreading propaganda. However, the measures and the effort the organization has made show that these accusations do not stand. The organization has created a massive network to inform the public about official data for the pandemics and all healthcare issues that concern the global community in recent times. All data made available from WHO are confirmed from a global network of experts affiliated with the organization, in order to inform the citizens of the world adequately.

For the misinformation through mass media, the organization pays attention to fake data and news about current healthcare affairs and makes sure that through social media the people are cautioned about such unreliable sources and avoid the misunderstanding between authorities and the citizens.

United States of America (USA)

The United States of America was one of the countries that faced the massive challenges with the healthcare system and the hygiene measures during the COVID pandemic. However, the emphasis they give to the education of students for public health and hygiene is notable and as aforementioned many school communities in the US prioritize health education through advocacy and seminars. Along with many other internal problems in the Americas and with the political crisis during the election process, managing the spread of the virus has not been an easy task for the government, as misinformation, propaganda and conspiracy theories for the virus are on the rise. Furthermore, the issue with the United Nations COVID forum has made the relations between the USA and China tense once again, despite the fact that during the pandemic China has asserted dominance with the completion of a worldwide 5G plan and their remarkable efforts to combat the pandemic inside their territory.

Outside the pandemic, there have been some cases of health propaganda after the 1980s, where opioid supporters created a propaganda based on addiction

concerns for such treatments. The backlash was apparent and the results were not optimal.

People’s Republic of China

As mentioned before in the guide, China has been one of the main coefficients in the COVID problem and there are many issues that have been involved during the pandemic. Firstly, their progress during the pandemic has been astonishing taking the circumstances and the behavior of the government, the authorities and the citizens themselves, since no one was theoretically prepared for such a crisis. However, the Chinese government was undermining other countries’ healthcare systems and their approach in handling the virus through international meetings and forums that were organized to discuss the next move of the global community. Their conflict was only limited to statements but it cost the cooperation between two superpowers towards the battle against the pandemic.

Figure 2: Figure: Exhibition center in China is turned into an emergency hospital for the patients of the pandemic.



Russian Federation/Soviet Union

As mentioned before, the Soviet Union was the first nation to adopt the method of health

propaganda to promote their innovative healthcare system. During the 1920s, where socialism was formed in the Soviet Union, researchers made known this healthcare system to the West, where the top priority was healthcare.

Now to more recent affairs, a Kremlin statement during the fight against the COVID pandemic brought a wave of reactions from the global community, as the Russian government claimed that researchers in the country have succeeded in finding an effective vaccine for the virus. Of course, the news intrigued many governmental officials around the world to confirm such a statement and to learn more about the vaccine, as the Kremlin was not transparent to such extent in their announcement. This is a characteristic example of health propaganda in modern days.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Event
1920 – 1930	The USSR initiates the creation of a citizen-centered healthcare system aiming to prioritize advanced public healthcare as a breakthrough against the West.

1980s	Massive growth in the opioid industry is noted in the US pharmaceutical market, marking the beginning of the opioid scandal.
October 2019	The 5G network was introduced in China.
December 2019	The first case of COVID was recorded in the province of Wuhan in China.
December 2020	A US spokesperson accuses China for international forum used as propaganda for the pandemic.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

The World Health Organization has acted against false information concerning medical issues and has mostly taken action in filtering sources that have to do with anti-vaccine movements, as this is one of the major issues in public information, especially in times of a pandemic. Also, organizations like the American Medical Association have contacted major private corporations to use their platforms in order to spread medical rhetoric and properly inform their “clients” through their platforms.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Ensuring Transparency and Cooperation between countries for healthcare improvement

One of the main causes of health propaganda is the lack of cross-information and cooperation for the general worldwide improvement of the public healthcare system. Especially during times of crisis, governments accuse and criticize the approach of other countries to their priorities, instead of cooperating and participating in a worldwide effort towards medical improvement. This is the main issue that occurs from the question of health propaganda and the one you should give your attention to the most in your resolutions. With your country’s policy as your guidance, you should propose effective solutions to secure transparency and safety in the sector of healthcare. You should be able to ensure that there are opportunities for international conventions for discussions on public health and that there is complete clarity and honesty in the information shared between the participants of such discussions to avoid any misunderstandings or conflicts in the future.

Healthcare Education and Source Reliability

Healthcare education also holds a major part of a possible provided solution. Due to lack of public health education, groups and sources that promote propagandistic methods in order to convince the public of their opinions are often successful, especially when it comes to crucial healthcare affairs such as the COVID

vaccine where there are lots of citizens that are unaware of the scientific aspects of the matter and try to find information from various sources that are often unreliable.

First of all, it is crucial for the young generation to learn about the basics of healthcare and the reliability of sources in general. If there are possibilities of seminars or speeches in the school environment, you should also devote your attention to organizing such events. Some proposals could be providing funds and personnel, either paid or voluntary, to present seminars to the students and inform them.

There is also the aspect of adults being educated. Usually for the majority of the public, their main source of information is social media such as Facebook. Thus, it is important to censor our sources and exclude unreliable websites, pages and independent groups. In order to achieve that, legislations concerning censoring should be implied to corporations that handle major social media. This could come in many forms that you will decide based on your countries' policies. Also, similar measures with public speeches and seminars can be launched worldwide, if governments cooperate with companies or independent groups that are experts in the field of public advocacy.

Legislations on Drugs and OTC Products Advertisements

During our evaluation of the opioid propaganda in the US, we have come to the conclusion that pharmaceutical companies can have their influence on doctors through various means in order to promote their products to patients and increase their profits with this procedure. This is the reason that these kinds of methods need to be severely legislated and restrained in order to maintain the diversity in the pharmaceutical market and to avoid side effects when it comes to the effectiveness of highly promising and advertised products. In your resolutions, you must definitely include a couple of solutions for this issue and also do not forget to address the issue of promoting OTC products or condemning them from the pharmacists. Keep in mind that the pharmacist and any health expert and doctor is obliged to give the patient choices, except in cases of extreme situations where the instructions towards the patient are clear.

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