

Vilela EFM. *Dengue in the media: all the things you cannot see*. Jundiaí: Paco Editorial; 2016.

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Dengue is one of the major infectious diseases in tropical regions in the world, being a widely publicized disease in the media. The book wrote by Edlaine Faria de Moura Vilela critically addresses the news of the first dengue epidemic in Brazil, in Ribeirão Preto, 1990.

The book is quite timely by addressing the issue of media and health information and how it affects the imaginary of individuals about diseases. We are currently dealing with fake news in health and in many other aspects of individuals' lives¹. Such news should be seen as a contest for the truth. In this sense, new strategies of communication in health should be thought¹. In an interview granted by Igor Sacramento, the researcher mentioned fake news in the case of yellow fever vaccination and how they can be harmful to the health of an entire group¹.

Thus, although the author does not approach yellow fever (but dengue and and yellow fever are quite close), the book brings up this interpretation of truth in the media, which not always is consistent with the facts. Although fake news are recent and not explicitly addressed by Vilela, it is important to understand that false and inaccurate news always existed. Edlaine Vilela highlights several of these inaccuracies in publicizing the epidemic in the media. In the preface, the author argues that print media is a mechanism for building information. In chapter 1, the role of the media in the epidemic is analyzed along with the formation of public opinion. Chapter 2 deepens the penetration of the media in the lives of individuals, with the concepts of mass culture and media communication: mass communication reinforces values and behaviors rather than modifying them. Thus, the author states that it is a need to make information and science closer, an idea that is corroborated by other authors: good communication between scientist and journalist is essential in the dissemination of science². For Martins, this communication is made even better by the conscious information check², a theme not directly addressed by Vilela, since the need for checking information is very recent. However, such sort of verification, nowadays,

occurs in a number of ways, and even by using of platforms in Internet sites³.

In chapter 3, the author describes general aspects of information and communication in public health. She uses the term 'discursive inclusion' to emphasize the relevance of the format and quantity of information conveyed, since, in excess, they generate a false sense of accomplishment but what occurs is the generation of large volumes of information that do not contribute to knowledge improvement. Therefore, information and communication professionals have to come closer to each other to guarantee that information will circulate and be understood by people. Edlaine Vilela takes up this idea in later chapters, indicating that the professional who provides health information should have a clear vision of this issue.

Chapters 4 and 5 address, respectively, the role of health professionals in preparing the information to be communicated, as well as the role of communication institutions in shaping individuals' opinions.

Chapters 6 and 7 deal with the epidemic history cited in the book and the type of research that took place, mainly based on Theory of Social Representations. The reserarch material consisted of magazines and newspapers of the region of Ribeirão Preto and the capital of São Paulo. These two chapters make a break with the previous ones - they are much more technical and speak more of the research itself as compared to the others, reminding a chapter of thesis or dissertation, which may cause some strangeness. However, the relationship between the media and the epidemic is taken up again in chapter 8: the author indicates that the media acted as a social actor in this phenomenon: "the disease became a media outbreak" (page 78, our translation). It is subtle how Edlaine Vilela presents these two words together: one that clearly recalls concepts of epidemic and another that relates to the news communication.

Chapter 9 shows the results of interviews with people who have experienced the epidemic process of the time. In chapter 10, Vilela systematizes the main research information. Questions included the role of political and health authorities; the bioecology approach of the vector and the epidemiological situation (it was concluded that the main concern of the news was to report confirmed and suspected cases); signs and symptoms, treatment and forms of diagnosis; control methods adopted and the action process; educational actions promotion. The author then created a "discourse-synthesis", representing what the media collective conveyed over each category of subthemes. Two aspects call attention: information about control methods that could be put into practice by the residents was not clearly provided for the population to protect



themselves; promotion of educational actions was the least discussed topic in the press. Comparing these topics with those addressed by the Brazilian media in the dengue epidemic in 1990, it is noted that “prevention”, which had previously been little discussed, is today the first theme reported by the news, showing that the use of the media in favor of public health policies has evolved⁴.”

In Chapter 11, it is stressed that information professionals must prioritize those that are fundamental to an epidemic, and transmit them as clearly and in the most popular language as possible. It has become commonplace to disseminate sensationalist information, which implies that the population is held responsible for the dengue problem, without, however, disseminating relevant knowledge for people to actively participate in the fight against the disease⁴. The root of this problem could be in the journalist training: this professional often does not have basic knowledge about the health-disease process, making elaboration of effective campaigns a difficult task.

The theme of chapter 11 is pessimistic, since the author affirms, based on her research, that there are no health professionals with solid training in social communication and vice versa. However, Vilela states that the media can be very important in reducing dengue mortality and morbidity⁵. Data from official surveys, when released, are outdated and do not represent small populations, which is not the case of newspapers and magazines⁵.

Chapters 12 and 13 are reflections about the social role of the press in relation to public health events and the chapters conclude that the media has not fulfilled its role in the dengue epidemic, which happened because information was disseminated with bias, even unintentional. Therefore, these chapters retake the main findings of previous chapters and recommend strategies for the prevention of epidemics, focusing on the role of the specialized media in health news.

The book, while dealing with an event that took place almost 30 years ago, raises a contemporary question: “what kind of information has the citizen had access in the epidemic processes: political, epidemiological or educational informa-

tion?” (p.155, our translation). This question, even nowadays, is not easy to answer: a 2004 study for the city of Belo Horizonte about dengue epidemic between 1996 and 2000, concluded that the media can contribute to the empowerment of citizens by increasing knowledge about the disease and its prevention, as well as to the autonomous insertion in society, provided there is quality of information, which, if not adequate, can be a source of alarmism and confusion⁶.

Finally, the book by Edlaine Vilela brings up two very interesting aspects that can be explored by readers: those who are more concerned with the epidemiology of diseases, public health, and history of epidemics, it is a book that adds to what has already been known, for bringing detailed information about a specific dengue epidemic in the most developed state of the country; for those who are interested in the recent themes of fake news, post-truths - that occurs when the true information is superimposed by that of strong emotional appeal¹ - and the news and health connection, the book extends the scope on the actions of media in health events.

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