

Health Care Providers Should Think About Zinc

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Along with the global effort to scale up zinc and oral rehydration salts (ORS) in the treatment of diarrhoea, we need effective training materials for health care professionals to introduce them to how effective zinc is for the treatment of diarrhea. Once they feel comfortable with this treatment, integrating it as part their practice and feel confident recommending it, more families will use it and more lives will be saved.

To help in this effort, a set of professional on-line resources has been developed and made available on the Zinc+ORS website. This resource has been established by McCann Global Health of McCann Health, advertising agency in collaboration with many members of the Diarrhea and Pneumonia Demand creation working group, including the Micronutrient Initiative. With these tools, we're aiming to provide support to key stakeholders in promoting the use of zinc and ORS. The really interesting aspect of this site is that tools and information provided can be adapted for country-specific messaging, all in the effort to *"save lives by promoting the use of these lifesaving products."*

The creative and savvy team at McCann played a lead role in the development of the information and marketing tools on the web site, which is targeted for use in public and private health clinics, with the goal of increasing the use -- or scale up -- of zinc and ORS. There also suitable for use in health-based retail shops, often a first stop many families make when a child is sick with diarrhoea. The resources on the site support a wide range of organizations: from organizations who work directly in communities and with families to ministries of health, public health workers to pharmaceutical professionals.

The site is a cutting-edge example of using social marketing, branding and positioning to achieve change. With clear wording against a clean bright background and a photo of a healthy young boy flexing his muscles, there is a sense that zinc can return strength. This is a long way from many of the posters of the past developed by health professionals with the standard "5 steps to using zinc & ORS" or "10 steps to hand-washing" all crammed into one poster with a mini-image for each "step".

The site is pharmaceutical detailing at its best. Detailing is the use of interactive media to present information to physicians, pharmacists and health care professions about new products, including training materials and public health information that can be shared with the intended audience, such as mothers.

For a pharmacist working in Gujarat, India, zinc may be very familiar to them as an ingredient in skin care products, but its role in diarrhoea treatment may be very new. The Zinc+ORS website materials are familiar and appeal to the scientific knowledge of such a provider. In addition, the information clearly explains the benefits of zinc and ORS for diarrhoea treatment, including guidance as to how to prescribe treatment and counsel caregivers. Staying up-to-date on the latest medical advances is often a source of pride for many providers in Gujarat and so this site should be well received.

The reason that pharmaceutical industries use this approach (providing individual medical providers with appealing materials) is that it can influence their prescribing practices, which is exactly what we are trying to do in our goal of scaling-up the use of zinc and ORS to treat diarrhoea. In some cases, this means positioning zinc as a first line treatment along with ORS, rather than the less desirable practice of prescribing antibiotics or anti-diarrhoeals. Providers, especially in private pharmacies, will now have something new to offer mothers when their child has diarrhoea - zinc!

The Zinc+ORS website goes one step further in that it allows partners in the global efforts to scale up zinc and ORS to translate, change and adapt the online material for best use, as well as share with other end-users. This allows the information to be as effective as possible, something expected in our digital age, where information is constant and individualized to be effective.

As global efforts surge forward to address diarrhoeal disease, which kills approximately 2000 children every day, this is an important tool to support countries as they scale-up and increase access to an effective and affordable solution and give the zinc and ORS the image it deserves.



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