Commentary

Using TED Talks to teach social determinants of health
Maximize the message with a modern medium

Eileen Nicolle MD CM CCFP Emmanuelle Britton MD CM CCFP Praseedha Janakiram MD CCFP Pierre-Marc Robichaud

Our world is characterized by the rapid sharing of messages and knowledge. The ability of ideas to go “viral” demonstrates the infectious way that a concept can travel around the globe. As technological innovations facilitate connection and communication across distances, the landscape of learning is evolving. Lectures can be recorded ahead of time and viewed online, or speakers can use text, voice, and video services (eg, Skype) to present their sessions. Furthermore, some institutions now offer open access to their intellectual property, with a view to increasing accessibility.

Ideas worth spreading
Technology, Entertainment and Design Talks, commonly known as TED Talks, are an example of our ability to rapidly disseminate great ideas. These online talks, which are freely available and accessible, allow people worldwide to listen to thought-provoking speakers talk passionately about their areas of expertise (www.ted.com/talks). The TED community seeks to share “ideas worth spreading,” and in doing so potentially educate and inform millions of people. The format of short talks, averaging 10 to 18 minutes, given by expert speakers has garnered worldwide interest and attention, and has even sparked community-organized local TEDx events. The TEDx events allow communities to host their own independent TED-like events with a lineup of speakers in front of a live audience.

The TED concept continues to evolve in response to its environment, speakers, audiences, and users, and draws upon TEDx talks from around the world to amass “a large volume of potentially powerful ideas from which to pick the best.”1 As a result of innovations such as TED Talks, educators now have more opportunity to make use of technology to enhance learning. Exposing learners to thought-provoking speakers can ignite discussion, debate, and reflection that continues long after a speaker’s 18 minutes are over. Therefore, the TED community represents one form of online information sharing that can be used for educational purposes.

Workshops on the social determinants of health
Recently, faculty in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Toronto in Ontario have begun to use TED Talks as a springboard for teaching the important concepts of the social determinants of health (SDOHs) to family medicine residents. Social determinants of health are factors that affect health and well-being—the circumstances in which we are born, grow up, live, work, and age. Although these factors might not always directly cause or prevent illness, they are root causes of ill or good health.2 There is increasing evidence supporting the importance of addressing these root causes to improve the health of individual patients, their families, and our communities.

Given the high quality of TED Talks available online, Department of Family and Community Medicine teachers have created a series of workshops focused on SDOHs as they relate to primary care. It should be mentioned that other forms of online media could have been used as well; however, the authors chose TED Talks owing to their familiarity with these talks and the range of topics available. Workshops cover topics such as income and social status, housing, food security, gender and women’s health, healthy child development and reduction of child mortality, social support networks and social inclusion, education and literacy, HIV and AIDS, culture, and physical environments.

While not all learners will gravitate toward standard SDOH lectures, integrating TED Talks into the SDOH curriculum might invigorate the discussion and enhance the value of this subject matter for learners. Each workshop uses a TED talk as a launching point for focused discussion. The workshops are created to make use of Prezi presentation software, which is an interactive medium that can highlight key concepts grounded in discussion and thought-stimulating activities. While many alternate presentation formats could be used to achieve the same objective, we have developed these workshops using Prezi to optimize and facilitate presenter flexibility and creative freedom during each presentation.

Future applications
In medicine, the vast amount of knowledge and skills required to practise based on principles of best care obliges us to teach our students with the most effective methods possible. The goals of education in medicine

This article has been peer reviewed.
Can Fam Physician 2014;60:777-8
Cet article se trouve aussi en français à la page 788.
Commentary | Using TED Talks to teach social determinants of health

In the spirit of ideas worth spreading, it is hoped that this creative teaching format can indeed be demonstrated to be worth spreading.

Dr Nicolle is a family physician at Markham Stouffville Hospital in Ontario and at Women’s College Hospital in Toronto, Ont, as well as Lecturer, Pre-departure Training Co-coordinator, and Co-coordinator of the Enhanced Skills Year in Global Health and Vulnerable Populations, all in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Toronto. Dr Britton is Clinical Lecturer in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Toronto, and a staff member at the South East Toronto Family Health Team, Toronto East General Hospital, and Bay Centre for Birth Control. Dr Janakiram is a family physician at the Crossroads Clinic at Women’s College Hospital, and Lecturer, Pre-departure Training Co-coordinator, and Co-coordinator of the Enhanced Skills Year in Global Health and Vulnerable Populations, all in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Toronto.

Mr Robichaud is a second-year family medicine resident at the University of Ottawa in Ontario and Founder and President of Gems of Hope.

Competing interests
None declared

Correspondence
Dr Eileen Nicolle, Markham Stouffville Hospital, Department of Family Medicine, 379 Church St, Markham, ON L6B OT1, telephone 905 472-2200; e-mail eileen.nicolle@gmail.com

The opinions expressed in commentaries are those of the authors. Publication does not imply endorsement by the College of Family Physicians of Canada.

References