

Television as a source of information on health and illness – review of benefits and problems

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ABSTRACT

Despite the dominating and expansive role of the Internet, global reports on mass media still find television as the most popular source of information on health. The following paper is an attempt to systematize the knowledge concerning television broadcast dedicated to the subject of health and illness. The authors aimed to identify the benefits and limitations resulting from the use of the audiovisual means to convey information on health; diagnosing potential threats and explaining trends and possibilities of making use of the television to educate and improve health awareness of the viewers. A critical review of 47 papers published in Polish and international scientific journals in years 2010 – 2014 has been performed. They were categorized into 8 following sections: 1) health information in medical television series; 2) subject

of health in reality television programmes and medical talk-shows; 3) health in television news programmes; 4) television and the issue of physical activity and nutrition; 5) television and selected stimulants (cigarettes/alcohol); 6) television and information about cancer and other diseases; 7) public service announcements concerning health/PSA; 8) television and health education/edutainment. In the light of the conducted review, the television presents itself as a promising source of information on the topic of health and illness which, provided one maintains a cautious attitude as well as moderation, influences the level of knowledge of the viewers, identification of simple symptoms and constitutes an important source of education in terms of prevention and avoiding risk behaviours.

Key words: television, health, health information, health education
