EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY IN PUBLIC HEALTH: THE NEED OF CITIZEN AND PATIENT EDUCATION FOR APPROPRIATE HEALTH DEMAND. THE CASES OF BSE, SARS AND AVIAN FLU

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INTRODUCTION

In the present society the need of understanding "health related topics" becomes more and more important for citizens and patients that would like to be protagonist of their own choices, but receive the most part of information from mass media, mainly from television, and for this reason can be strongly influenced by a market oriented communication. The health demand of the public derives from his perception of needs, that sometimes are not real but induced by economic or political interests and scientific misunderstanding and prejudices. This problem becomes more evident in the case of "media storms", that is when a health related event is reported by mass media with a so high emphasis and frequency that it represents at least the 50% of the total health information spread in a particular period of time.

METHODS

The Health Communication Observatory (HCO) of Pisa University since 1999 has monitored and collected the health related articles published by the three most important Italian newspapers: "La Repubblica", "La Stampa" and "Il Corriere della Sera". In this paper three cases of media storm are studied: BSE, SARS and avian flu.

MEDICAL STORM

CONCLUSIONS

These cases show the need to educate citizens for a better understanding of mass media health related information improving their health literacy since the primary school.