

“Signs of the heart”: Heart failure public awareness campaign of the Portuguese Society of Cardiology



The Portuguese Society of Cardiology (PSC) appointed Heart Failure (HF) as one of the main priorities for the biennium 2017-2019. A communication strategy was designed to address 3 major vectors of HF management: policies and health decisors, health professionals and general public.

Regarding the first vector, a working group that included PSC and national health agencies, was formed to evaluate and propose HF policies to be followed by health institutions in order to reduce the burden of this disease. Moreover, PSC organized several discussions forums with key stakeholders in order to place HF in the top of health policies goals.

Health professionals play a major role in HF management. In the last two years PSC organized more than 30 Advanced Life Support in HF courses that involved more than five hundred of health care physicians. Recently, PSC launched a new program specifically designed for HF in the ambulatory setting.

Communication with the general public was, without any doubt, the most challenging of the three strategic pillars. Apart from the broad sources of information available, a public awareness campaign, in order to become effective, should focus on a single message. PSC asked that question to itself: what should we communicate to the general public? In order to have a clear strategy about how to set up the campaign, PSC conducted a market research study and the answer came naturally: the Portuguese people are not aware about HF symptoms/presentation.

Now that PSC knew what to communicate, it was then time to give an answer to a second question: how to deliver this message? After consulting several communication agencies, PSC opted to make a parallelism between HF and a situation that everyone would recognize: a broken car.

The importance of paying attention to heart’s signs and the sudden complications associated are the main elements of the HF campaign.

In order to maximize the impact of the campaign, it was very important to explore all the available communication channels, from traditional means such TV, radio or outdoors to digital means such online advertisements, social networks and specific website. An initiative with this level of ambition would need strong investment that was granted through a crowdfunding movement near industry partners.



Fig 1: Campaign key visual

It was also very important to have patients on board and this was made by stablishing a collaboration partnership with the HF patient’s association.

PSC launched this campaign in the end of January in a very innovative way. A giant heart on its anatomical shape was built and installed in one the major streets of Lisbon, which was a perfect way to attract media and to engage with the population. Salvador Sobral, Eurovision Song Contest former winner, sponsored the campaign. PSC has the goal to create a real movement around this campaign and several actions with the referred giant heart are undergoing.

Apart from an installation of the heart in one the busiest metro stations in Lisbon, the giant heart will now travel to several counties within the country.



Fig 2: Campaign launch. On the right, João Morais and Diogo Cavavo, PSC Board Member. On the left, Vicente Moura, HF Patient's Association President and Salvador Sobral, campaign ambassador

By establishing a partnership with the National Pharmacy Association, PSC will be able to distribute educational materials at national level on this very important segment. Moreover, through its associates, PSC will also be able to reach the health units.

Social networks play a major role in terms of communication. For that reason a hashtag of the campaign - #sinaisdocoração - was created and people are motivated to share pictures with the heart.

PSC wants to highlight the fact that HF's symptoms don't have an exact place and time to occur. Nobody remains indifferent to such powerful images and certainly that this type of campaign can reach a large branch of the population.

Following the advances made in Acute Coronary Syndrome Management seen in Portugal, now is time to embrace HF as a priority. Will this campaign play a role in HF care? PSC strongly believes so.



Fig 3: Heart stuck in tram line

If you want to know more about this campaign, please visit PSC's

- Website <https://spc.pt/web/guest/campanha-insuficiencia-cardiaca>

- Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/spcardiologia>