

# **“Promises and Betrayals”: A Radio Novella Focused on Chronic Disease Education**

[Announcer] *This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

[Melissa Wilson] Hello, I’m Melissa Wilson for CDC’s journal *Preventing Chronic Disease*. On the phone with me today are Dr. Marcela Frazier and Dr. Connie Kohler. Doctors Frazier and Kohler are the authors of a recent PCD paper about a series of Spanish radio novellas focused on chronic disease education. Thank you both for joining us today.

[Connie Kohler] Thanks, thanks for having us.

[Marcela Frazier] Thank you for inviting us.

[Melissa Wilson] Dr. Kohler, tell us the name of your paper and give us some background on the topic.

[Marcela Frazier] Okay, the paper has a pretty long name, so I’m going to have to read it out: *Engaging a Community in Developing and Entertainment Education Spanish Language Radio Novella Aimed at Reducing Chronic Disease Risk Factors*. And this is a paper that is a description of a radio novella program that we developed in response to CDC’s Communities Putting Prevention to Work. We developed a series of 48 five-minute episodes that embedded messages and examples of obesity and secondhand tobacco smoke avoidance, prevention of obesity, and then we embedded these five-minute episodes in a one-hour radio talk show, or sometimes called a radio magazine show. And so the article describes the process from beginning to end.

[Melissa Wilson] And Dr Frazier, what exactly is a novella, and why was this chosen as a means for health education?

[Marcela Frazier] A novella is a serial drama program, and it presents the opportunity to really show real-life stories, and to model the consequences of positive and negative behaviors - things that we do every day - and what ends up being the results of those every day behaviors.

[Melissa Wilson] Dr Kohler, what sparked the idea for this type of radio novella?

[Connie Kohler] We could go back a long way. We’ve actually produced about five of these over the last 10 years, but it was originally sparked when I went to a talk by Dr. Everett Rogers, who might be best known for his work in diffusion of innovations, but in this case, he was talking at our AIDS research center and he described a radio soap opera that he’d been involved with in Tanzania to prevent AIDS. I was just totally blown away when, when I heard the talk, and I thought I have got to find a way to do this, and so I started looking for a way to do it, and as I said, 10 years later this is our fifth one.

[Melissa] Dr. Frazier, you mention in your paper the Birmingham radio market. Were the novellas picked up by any other radio stations?

[Marcela Frazier] Yes, we have been having our novellas in Phoenix, Denver, and Atlanta. And we also hope to maybe take them to other countries, to Spanish-speaking countries.

[Melissa Wilson] Dr Kohler, the radio education approach is rarely used in the United States. Why do think this is, and do you think an increase in these radio dramas related to health education would benefit all communities?

[Connie Kohler] The reason I think that it's rarely used, well, actually there's maybe two or three reasons. One is that I think people generally assume that in the US with the kind of media-saturated environment we have that something like this really wouldn't work because we'd be competing with so many other things on the media. Another reason might be that it's perceived as costly, but actually when you consider the reach, that kind of offsets the cost. And then also evaluation for actual behavior change is difficult and it's expensive. You know, there's a lot of...there's a lot more, I guess, involved than just asking people, you know, since you've watched the program, have you changed your behavior. But we do ask them that, but's it's not that, quite that easy. I do think it would benefit all communities, or most communities. I think that one of the things people can look at is ethnic radio and local community radio, which I'm a big believer in. And I think working with these kinds of radio stations you're gonna reach people that would benefit from this kind of programming.

[Melissa Wilson] Dr Frazier, you mention in your paper that the outcomes of the effectiveness of the novellas will be reported elsewhere. Were the novellas a success, and where can we find the results and follow up on their success?

[Marcela Frazier] We do consider the whole, the entire participation of the community to be a success. They were part of the developing of the stories, they were actors, they participated in calling in to the radio program, asking very good questions, and they are currently listening to it online, too. We know that they're visiting our website and listening to the episodes. We also had a pilot evaluation, where we saw a change in behavior that was very positive, and especially in the consumption of fried foods. And participants reported that they decreased the consumption of fried foods, and also they increased their consumption of fruits and vegetables, so that's very promising and we hope to find further results on this. We are presenting at the American Public Health Association in San Francisco, so we hope to present some of our results there. We have had some challenges because of the new Alabama immigration law — people having some difficulty in participating or some fear out there.

[Melissa Wilson] What's next for the two of you? Are you planning any additional episodes or other series of novellas related to health or chronic disease?

[Connie Kohler] I know that the community has expressed a desire for more episodes, and as soon as we find funding for that, we will do it. Recently, we also submitted a proposal to develop a series promoting organ donation among Latinos. So those are, those are two projects awaiting funding.

[Marcela Frazier] I think it would be ideal to eventually grow into bigger markets where we can actually incorporate stories into the main soap operas, like the TV soap operas, incorporating these models, these behavior models.

[Melissa Wilson] Thank you both for joining us. To read the paper and listen to the novellas we talked about today, visit [www.cdc.gov/pcd](http://www.cdc.gov/pcd).

*[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), or call 1-800-CDCINFO.*