



Local Nurse Uses Community Outreach to Spread the Word about Clinical Trials

When regular, everyday citizens give presentations in their local community, those events have a special warmth and an extra dimension that “keeps the moment alive” long after the event ends.

That was the striking lesson driven home to Theda Martin, a 61-year-old nurse from New Albany, IN.

Theda, who bubbles over with enthusiasm about her work, held a grass roots community education evening at her local church. Through her own initiative, Theda gave a talk about clinical trials and the important medical developments they produce. Her speech opened the eyes of her fellow churchgoers and showed an effective way to get people interested in clinical trials.

While more formal speeches from outside experts are quite valuable, a presentation by someone in the local community creates enhanced trust, credibility, and connection.

Theda gave her speech at the Harvey Browne Presbyterian Church in Louisville, KY, just about six miles from New Albany. She’s an active congregant there and is also a member of the church’s Wellness Committee, which presents a different speaker each month after the Wednesday evening services.

Theda, a quality and compliance manager with Kforce Clinical Research (which provides staffing to pharmaceutical companies), had worked as a research site coordinator.

“My life is my work,” says Theda. “I love what I do.”

The idea for doing a local presentation had come to Theda gradually.

“Our Wellness Committee was always looking for a presentation that would be interesting to people who attend the Wednesday services,” says Theda. “Most of the presentations have been disease-related, about

subjects like Alzheimer’s, heart disease, and stroke, although we have also had other subjects.”

Church is often a place for inspiration, and Theda was struck with the idea that church members would be interested in hearing about clinical trials. For about a year, Theda toyed with the notion of giving a talk to the group. Finally she proposed it to the Wellness Committee. They responded with enthusiasm.

Theda thought that creating a presentation might be daunting. But it turned out to be much easier than she anticipated.

“I started just throwing together some slides and then I learned that CISCRP had material they made available to volunteer speakers,” says Theda. “They had a PowerPoint presentation and background material that I could use.” The ready-made material from the nonprofit Center for Information and Study on Clinical Research Participation simplified the task of

putting together a professional-quality presentation and handouts.

While some speakers struggle with stage fright, that wasn't a hurdle for Theda. "I'm used to doing presentations as part of my job as trainer, and besides, I love to talk," Theda laughs.

The presentation was a hit. Turnout at the Wednesday night presentation was excellent, as was the audience response. About 25 people gathered to hear Theda's talk.

"It was well received and was really great," says Theda. Theda's friend, a coordinator at the University of Louisville helped with the presentation and was on hand to provide support and questions.

Her presentation made it clear that having a person from the community give the talk brought several key advantages:

Trust and receptivity: "If people have seen you and know of you from the community, and you have a good reputation, they are likely to give more weight to what you say. They are more likely to be open to your message and may be more receptive," says Theda.

"Of course, you have to have credibility. Before I gave the talk, I described my background, so people knew I am a professional and am credible in this subject," says Theda. "But also, if you're from the community, they know a little about you and know if they feel they can trust you."

Potential improved attendance: Some people may be more likely to attend a speech when they are acquainted with or are aware of the person doing the presenting. Although for many people the topic will determine whether or not they attend, others may be inspired to show up simply because they know the speaker. For people who were on the

fence about getting out to attend the speech, knowing the speaker could put them over the top.

Breaking down the shyness barriers: "Some people may be shy or inhibited about asking questions in a public forum," says Theda. "But if they know you, even slightly, they may be more likely to speak up. In this case, when we asked people if they wanted to talk about their experiences, everyone spoke up and shared. I think they're more likely to ask questions, and more likely to stay after and interact."

Continued contact and feedback: Being in the community gives attendees someone they can follow up with. "Some people didn't have time to ask questions on the evening of my presentation, but they saw me in church or around at some later time and they followed up and contacted me days later with additional questions," says Theda. "It keeps the moment alive."

With local community outreach presentations, attendees are often acquainted with one another. In this case, they began sharing experiences among themselves and continued talking with each other after the lecture. This helps to maximize and extend the speech's impact.

Finally, when you're in the community, you can get feedback later on. "One woman in church came up to me weeks later and said that her husband just couldn't stop talking about the presentation," says Theda. That type of positive feedback can be very rewarding. It reinforces that you've done a valuable service bringing information to your community.

Theda's successful evening, the warm audience response, and the valuable information she provided, illustrates how people in any community can spread the word on clinical trials awareness.

"It's a wonderful and worthy thing to do," says Theda. "There doesn't always have to be a big organized event that takes the whole day. Anyone can do this." ■

The Center for Information and Study of Clinical Research Participation (CISCRP) welcomes healthcare professionals who would like to do volunteer community presentations about clinical trials. CISCRP can provide a PowerPoint presentation template with background information and statistics, which volunteers can customize to add their own information and experiences. Also available from CISCRP are educational brochures that can be distributed to the attendees.

To learn more about doing a presentation or volunteering, visit <http://www.discrp.org/professional/speaker.php>.

This story is from a series of articles created by CISCRP as part of their educational awareness campaign to increase public understanding that those who volunteer to participate in clinical trials are genuine "Medical Heroes."



Theda Martin