Title: India’s Zika controversy: communication issues at the heart of transparency, public health governance and ethics

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Author comments to first round of review + reviewer responses 050917

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|  | Author comment | Reviewer response |
| Surveillance | I do agree that the topic of surveillance is central to the problem being investigated and speaking to it will definitely strengthen the piece. However, the domain of infectious diseases epidemiology (within which surveillance is covered), is out of the scope of my expertise. Epidemiological surveillance systems within countries, and reporting protocols between member countries and the WHO are complex issues about which I would be wary to comment as there are better informed experts who could speak to these matters with more authority. | *while there may be better informed experts, it should be possible to summarise issues pertaining to surveillance (i.e basics of surveillance, WHO requirements of member countries for reporting, and what India is doing), restricting it to what is relevant to the issue of communication* |
| Communication | I appreciate the points you've raised with regards to the communication angle. I had included the social media analytics as IJME had expressed interest in this kind of data during our initial conversation. Although the proportion of Twitter users relative to the population (or even the population with digital access) might be seemingly small, I believe this data is valuable on two counts: 1) Twitter and Facebook are now used daily by a majority of our policymakers as a direct communication channel with the public. As such, analysis of this data provides a glimpse into their communication priorities, and 2) From what I see, this is really all the data that seems available in terms of the government's health communication efforts pertaining to Zika (from what I've searched, I have found no evidence pertaining to sustained communication campaigns using traditional media channels). | *While the social media is used by policy makers, and is worth studying, the traditional media -- newpapers, television and radio -- is the basis of the government's public health communication strategy. If a search has been done, and there is no evidence pertaining to sustained communication campaigns using traditional media channels, it is important to state this. While of course any comment on the traditional media is limited because government newspaper and TV campaigns may not be fully available on the net, that too needs to be stated.* |
|  | My purpose of including the unpublished survey data was to provide an evidence-based perspective on the variances in health information seeking across the country especially because this kind of evidence seems lacking in the scientific (or grey) literature. But I agree with you that the linkage of this section with the previous sections seems a tad tenous and hence, I am happy to exclude it from the paper altogether. (Here, I must add that I am unavailable to find specific figures on TV spending specific to Zika communication campaigns.) | *Yes, please do* |
|  | In response to your other questions, I can revisit the National Risk Comm Plan to comment upon what it says vis-a-vis the issues you've listed (i.e. if it does say anything about those issues). However, the issues pertaining to IHR reporting have been covered extensively in commentaries/reports in the news media (including my pieces in Scroll and The Conversation) as well as shorter academic commentaries in places like BMJ, and as such, we might risk being repetitive. | *Yes, please do* |
|  | The one angle that might then be unique and worth pursuing (especially apropos IJME's ambit), might be whether the public has the right to be informed about disease outbreaks when the numbers are relatively low; and present the arguments for and against doing so. However, this would require a substantial reworking of the paper and I will need to revert to you about a timeline after examining my other commitments over the next few months. | *Yes, IJME would be interested in this angle.* |