

A Report on CAMFOMEDICS Quiz I 1996

Introduction

In September 1995, CAMFOMEDICS launched its first Essay writing competition in the North West and Centre Provinces of Cameroon. The target group consisted of secondary and high school students from the 5th to the Upper sixth form (Seconde to Terminale in the French-speaking region). Participants were requested to write an essay of about 400 words on what they consider to be the main health problems affecting the Cameroonian Youth today and to suggest solutions to these.

One of the aims of this exercise was to x-ray the degree of health awareness among the youth. On the other hand, more important to us was the pedagogic aspect. We wanted, through such a competition to incite the youth in particular and Cameroonians as a whole to give more thought and perhaps priority to health issues than had hitherto been the case. By allowing them 3 months to write the essays, the participants were allowed ample time to think; talk with their brothers and sisters, parents, teachers and friends. We wanted to do health education without prescribing any do's and don'ts but by having those concerned reflect. Socrates used similar methods some 2400 years ago with great success. Going through all 113 essays sent in, I can say confidently and with great satisfaction that this goal was attained.

Sampling

Participants were requested to post their contributions to us by December 31st 1995. In all, there were 42 English essays from the North West Region and 72 in French from the Centre Region. 69% of the participants gave their ages which ranged between 14 and 19. The arithmetic mean was 16,95 and the median 17. The female to male sex ratio for those who gave their gender (96%) was 1:1.1. Most of the participants from the North West Province were male whereas from the Centre province, female participants dominated.

Evaluation

Two juries were set up, each consisting of 6 persons and responsible for evaluation of the English or French essays. To prevent identification of participants, the essays were all coded by the co-ordinator before being posted to the jury members together with guidelines on the allocation of points. The points had to be written on a separate piece of paper and sent to the co-ordinator. On average, each essay received points from 5 or 6 different persons which were then averaged. By April, the results were ready for publishing in Cameroon.

General Analysis of the Essays

Most of the participants showed evidence of sound research and interest in the topic. The 5 most commonly raised problems were: AIDS, tobacco abuse, alcohol abuse, poor health infrastructure and drug abuse. Table 1 shows the main problems mentioned in 21 Essays.

<u>PROBLEM:</u>	<u>No. of times mentioned:</u>
AIDS	13
Alcohol abuse	12
Tobacco abuse	12
Poor health infrastructure	11
Drug abuse	10
Nutrition	9
Socio-economic (jobs, crime...) 9	

STDs	9
Moral crisis	6
Poor Environmental Hygiene	6
Infectious Diseases	6
Malaria	4
Illiteracy	2
Clandestine Abortions	2

Other problems mentioned included malpractice due to lack of motivation on the part of some nurses and Doctors, particularly in government run hospitals and health centres. The filth in most of our big towns, villages and hospitals as well as clandestine abortions, „bleaching“, and some traditional practices were equally frowned at. For the latter, some were regarded as not being hygienic. Others, they said, favoured morbidity in young girls by encouraging early and forced marriages, and by denying women the pleasure of eating certain delicious and nutritious foods like eggs.

Many participants blamed the moral crisis, alcohol abuse, tobacco abuse and sexually transmitted diseases on the West. Adverts, especially for tobacco products and movies were the main culprits. Most youths, they said, try to emulate movie-heroes who in most cases smoke and drink heavily and are highly promiscuous. Witchcraft, very hard parents and idleness were also condemned.

To solve the problems diagnosed above, the two most important points raised were the intensification of health education in our schools, especially in the rural areas and the improvement on health infrastructures by government.

Another salient point brought up was that of the youth getting together in self help initiatives. Such groups could, for instance, organise clean up campaigns, health education campaigns with the assistance of competent health professionals sent by the health authorities (one even mentioned CAMFOMEDICS!).

To reduce drug abuse, alcoholism and crime, it was proposed that government should create more job opportunities as well as recreational centres and play grounds for the youth. Research on AIDS and other tropical diseases had to be intensified and International Organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations were requested to give Cameroon a helping hand.

Because of the poor coverage of some of our rural areas with health care facilities, it was further suggested that young people with GCE `A` or `O` level be trained as health auxiliaries who would then work in their villages of origin. This would also go a long way in solving the communication barrier that sometimes exists between the staff of hospitals and health centres and the patients.

Prostitution, some emphasised, had to be prohibited and adverts for tobacco products banned or subjected to very strict legislation. Alcoholic beverages ought not to be sold to minors and the censorship of movies, especially on CRTV should be tightened up.

Winners

The winners received cash prizes ranging between 5000 and 25,000 F CFA. In addition, all participants received consolation prizes including a special CAMFOMEDICS pen. In

Bamenda, the prize- award was chaired by the honourable Governor for the North West Region. The winners' names are shown below.

We hope to launch the second competition in September. This time around, we wish to have participants from all ten provinces in Cameroon. The theme is Traditional medicine and the target group, students in Upper VI and „terminal“. We would be most grateful if you give us a helping hand this time around.

Conclusion

It is not easy to give a very objective report on 113 hand-written articles in English and French. In making a résumé, some points are bound to be left out, which the authors might have considered very important and some taken in which most readers might consider trivial. The arguments considered in writing this report were the most frequently mentioned and striking. I hope all the same, that you have some idea of how the Cameroonian Youths today think about their health problems and what could be done to remedy them.

Winners' List for the North West Province:

1 st	Anye, Verla Isidore	20,000 F CFA
2 nd	Bongkiyung, Kewir Delphine	15,000 F CFA
3 rd	Sakeh, Forcob	10,000 F CFA
4 th	Chuo, Mua Innocent	7,500 F CFA
5 th	Njинуwo, Conrad Bayelle	5,000 F CFA

Winners' List for the Centre Province:

1 st	Eze Edoa	17,500 F CFA
2 nd	Tsougou, Angele	17,500 F CFA
3 rd	Eboug, Abel	10,000 F CFA
4 th	Belinga Evina, N. Felicie	6,250 F CFA
5 th	Noah, Marceline Liliane	6,250 F CFA

Acknowledgement

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Report presented by:
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