



Movies with public health themes at a medical school library: interest and uptake

To study the potential role of movies in medical student education, a list of 15 movies with strong public health themes was selected.^{1 2} These movies were then made available in a medical school library in 2009 and we studied student acceptability of watching these movies in their leisure time (manuscript of study under review). At the end of 2009 we supplemented the collection with another five movies, using a similar method as per the original selection process. Here we briefly describe usage data of these movies for the 2010 year.

Methods—DVDs of 20 commercial movies with public health-related content (Table 1) were made available for free use from the medical school library (University of Otago, Wellington). For 16 of the DVDs, two copies were available in different formats to facilitate viewing on different machines.

The viewing of the movies was encouraged among fourth-year medical students during their public health module in the 2010 academic year. Students were requested to select a movie of their choice, view it, and then to verbally report back on the public health themes in a dedicated (but not formally assessed) session at the end of the module. This session was facilitated by one of us [PG]. Data were collected on DVD loans for the 2010 year from the library's electronic records.

Results and Discussion—Based on the number of DVDs loaned during the 2009 year (Table 1), there was reasonable interest in watching these movies. Loans were mainly by fourth-year students (65%, 137/211) with the rest by other library users (staff and other students). Of all registered fourth-year students enrolled in 2010, most (55%, 48/87) withdrew at least one DVD. Of those who loaned a DVD, a majority (73%) withdrew more than one (mean = 2.9, range = 1–11). However, all of these data on usage are likely to be underestimates since for each DVD loaned there could be viewings by multiple students or additional people (including other household members not affiliated with the University of Otago). This pattern is likely to dominate over the instances of the loaned DVD not being viewed at all, or incompletely viewed.

Out of all the DVDs, the most popular for all users and for fourth-year students, was *Sicko* followed by *Born into Brothels* (Table 1).

To ensure good access of the DVDs to fourth-year students, we did not actively promote the availability of movies to other library users. However, this additional promotion may be considered in the future since the loaning scheme had worked well in 2010 with manageable demand and no loss or damage of DVDs reported.

Based on the presentations by the students in the scheduled “teaching” session, it was apparent that most students were able to provide a reasonable synopsis of the movie. Nevertheless, some were less able to tease out the key public health message(s) in the movie. Further work is required to better understand the educational value of watching such movies for medical students, as opposed to just entertainment value.

Conclusions—The loan data indicate reasonable levels of usage and likely interest in these movies with public health themes by students and other medical school library users. Continuing with this approach appears worthwhile, though further work is required to better understand the actual educational value of such movies with public health themes.

Table 1. Loans of movies (DVDs) with public health themes from a medical school library during the period 1 January to 8 December 2010 (University of Otago, Wellington)

| Movie title (year)—ordered by popularity for “all users” | Loans by fourth year medical students | Loans by all registered library users (students & staff) |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Sicko</i> (2007) | 16 | 21 |
| <i>Born into Brothels</i> (2004) | 15 | 19 |
| <i>Dark Days</i> (2000) | 8 | 17 |
| <i>Milk</i> (2008) | 11 | 16 |
| <i>Food Inc</i> (2008) | 9 | 15 |
| <i>The Insider</i> (1999) | 8 | 15 |
| <i>Super Size Me</i> (2004) | 11 | 14 |
| <i>The Yes Men</i> (2005) | 9 | 14 |
| <i>Motorcycle Diaries</i> (2004) | 9 | 13 |
| <i>The Constant Gardener</i> (2005) | 8 | 12 |
| <i>Amazing Grace</i> (2006) | 4 | 10 |
| <i>An Inconvenient Truth</i> (2006) | 6 | 10 |
| <i>Erin Brockovich</i> (2000) | 7 | 9 |
| <i>The Corporation</i> (2003) | 4 | 8 |
| <i>Who Killed the Electric Car?</i> (2006) | 4 | 6 |
| <i>And the Band Played On</i> (1993) | 4 | 5 |
| <i>Bright Leaves</i> (2003) | 1 | 3 |
| <i>A Civil Action</i> (1998) | 1 | 2 |
| <i>Bowling for Columbine</i> (2002) | 2 | 2 |
| <i>Michael Clayton</i> (2007) | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 137 | 211 |

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References:

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