



Case Report

1	Case Number	0397/12
2	Advertiser	National Stroke Foundation
3	Product	Community Awareness
4	Type of Advertisement / media	TV
5	Date of Determination	10/10/2012
6	DETERMINATION	Upheld - Modified or Discontinued

ISSUES RAISED

- 2.3 - Violence Causes alarm and distress
- 2.3 - Violence Causes alarm and distress to Children

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

The advertisements show a man dressed in black in a basement. He is using a facsimile of a human brain to demonstrate what happens when someone has a stroke. He is depicted as a serial killer and pokes the brain with a scalpel and then he appears to strike the brain with a hammer. There were 2 advertisements on air during the time the complaints were received.

The 30 second advertisement:

- Tells the view that one in six people has a potential killer lurking inside them
- Depicts stroke as a silent serial killer
- Tells the viewer stroke is the second biggest killer of Australians
- Conveys the message that for 12,000 people each year stroke leaves them significantly disabled or kills them – by using a brain we are able to educate people that stroke is a ‘brain attack’

- Asks people to Help Fight Stroke and gives the address www.fightagainststroke

The longer ad also explains stroke can cause brain damage which may lead to loss of the ability to speak or to the loss of bladder control.

THE COMPLAINT

A sample of comments which the complainant/s made regarding this advertisement included the following:

This advertisement is very disturbing in its comparison of an illness suffered by many people in the community and comparing it to that of a crazed serial killer. It does not educate. It shows graphically human brains being violently destroyed. This ad is very disturbing to myself as an adult, let alone children. The actor is depicted in a menacing manner when he wields his scalpel in an effort to frighten people. It is completely dark and frightening and will cause nightmares for sensitive individuals. There are far better ways to educate, not terrify the community. Shocking that advertisers think this appropriate.

I do not understand what is being advertised?

I can't see the point in just broadcasting that "stroke is bad". The consequences of stroke are many and varied.

I am furious that people who are fearful of stroke, or worse still, have recently suffered a stroke, could be somehow lead to believe, by this advertisement, that the consequences are similar to a mallet being brought down on your head with blunt, intense force.

There is no health information value in this advertisement.

It is horrific. I know a man who recently died suddenly with a stroke at the age of 48yrs old and his wife is still totally devastated. I hope to God she never sees this horrendous add. It is unnecessarily macabre and violent.

It is highly graphic and horrendous. My sister witnessed a suicide where obliterated his head/brains in front of everyone and she has spent a long time in counselling and if she sees this TV commercial it will destroy all her recovery. Advertisements should NOT be allowed to be so graphic and to show a human brain and someone smashing it. Completely unnecessary and disgusting.... please help me have it removed.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

Comments which the advertiser made in response to the complainant/s regarding this advertisement include the following:

The National Stroke Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation that works to stop stroke, save lives and end suffering. The 'Fight Stroke' Campaign is an integral component of our key strategy to raise the awareness of stroke across the community. In Australia, around 160 strokes occur every day wreaking immediate and devastating changes on the lives of those who suffer them and on those around them. The NSF works to raise awareness of stroke; prevent stroke; improve treatment and make life better for stroke

survivors. An important strategy in our work is to improve the community's understanding of stroke and to provide hope for those affected.

Stroke is the second biggest killer of Australians. However, Australians continue to underestimate the threat of stroke and may be ignoring key prevention messages. In addition the health system is not responding to people's needs and there is inadequate funding for stroke prevention, awareness, treatment, care and research.

Stroke happens in an instant and people have no time to prepare themselves for what lies ahead – often a long and lonely journey through rehabilitation. Lives are changed dramatically. It is estimated there are 350,000 people in Australia living after a stroke.

Stroke is the second biggest killer of Australians behind heart disease but in spite of this, it is not considered by the community as something people should be protecting themselves from. By amplifying the consumer, clinician and media voice we believe we can change this and make stroke matter to all Australians.

The "Fight Stroke" mass media campaign is one component of an integrated strategy designed to raise awareness of stroke. It has been developed to increase the profile of stroke and encourage all Australians to speak out to improve the outcomes for people who have had a stroke.

The campaign will:

- Educate people about stroke
- Get people talking about stroke
- Build a movement of people who are willing to join the fight against stroke; and
- Ultimately, make stroke matter to all Australians

This campaign provides a lever for the work the NSF does by making people more aware of stroke from an individual and societal perspective. In addition, it increases the impact of stroke messages at an individual and government level.

The campaign includes:

- a mass media advertising campaign
- a website for people to join the fight against stroke
- a public relations and media campaign to highlight consumer stories and publish opinion pieces from invited clinicians in support of the campaign
- a coordinated grass roots campaign, recruiting and supporting people touched by stroke to tell their stories and demonstrate why more needs to be done

The decision to take the approach we have taken was not taken lightly. After more than ten years of tireless campaigning to ensure services are available to reduce the impact of stroke on all Australians, a recent survey showed that only 6% of people thought it was a health concern. This is coupled with the fact people affected by stroke are often unable to get appropriate care and support because it is not a high priority for government either. We know things should be better than this but could not get people to understand the impact stroke has on individuals and those affected by it. People did not hear any stroke related messages.

Our board and management team made the decision that a different approach was needed. We developed several concepts and tested these extensively with stroke survivors and carers, as well as people not affected by stroke, through focus group testing. We also talked at great length with our consumer council (an advisory group of stroke survivors and carers) about the best approach. The message we got was that although the campaign was confrontational it was needed to get people to start to pay attention to stroke and that we needed this to happen if we are to see real change.

The focus groups were conducted using Galileo Kaleidoscope, a professional market research company. The findings from their comprehensive research among the target market and among the advisory group of stroke survivors and carers suggested that to gain cut

through and to get people to talk about and understand stroke we needed to create an advertisement that would get people talking. To do this we used a stylised rather than a realistic approach. We tested the communication messages with these focus groups and they said this advertisement told them:

“Stroke is a silent killer lurking, waiting to strike randomly”

“That a stroke is a silent serial killer that can strike anyone, anytime”

No decisions were made without consultation with these groups given the sensitivity of the subject, and our stylised portrayal. Some of the verbatim from the research include:

“It’s quite graphic and kind of creepy...makes you think about stroke more seriously”

[Makes me] “Scared that people are at such a high risk”

“Very dramatic. Love the ad. The brain makes it real and we can handle it after watching the lungs, so its all good! Very well done... The hammer gets the point across”

“Aware that strokes can happen at any time to anyone”

“Slightly taken aback. It is to the point, and I would think will register with most males that strokes can kill”

Australia has a history of using campaigns that shock viewers to ensure they have the necessary cut through. Campaigns such as the Grim Reaper HIV campaign is one such example and when we tested the fight stroke campaign with focus groups this campaign was the most remembered of all health campaigns. This was followed by the TAC and QUIT campaigns which are also graphic in nature but remembered by the audiences many years later.

The National Stroke Foundation has a proud history of community social marketing activities and has been promoting and advertising the FAST – signs of stroke campaign and the Know Your Numbers campaign aimed at educating people about the importance of getting blood pressure checked to prevent stroke. These messages are not getting through to the community as is evidenced by only 6% of people considering stroke as a health concern for them. Indeed, many people are still unsure what a stroke actually is and think it happens to the heart and not to the brain. These campaigns will continue to run and we believe will have a greater impact on their audience when stroke matters to them.

The FAST campaign is designed to educate consumers to recognise the signs of a stroke. A stroke is a medical emergency and it is imperative that everyone can recognise the signs of stroke so immediate action can be taken to save lives and reduce disability. The FAST Campaign is an integral component of our key strategy to raise the awareness.

The Know Your Numbers campaign is run predominantly in Queensland and New South Wales where funding has been received from the state governments. This campaign educates consumers about the importance of having your blood pressure checked and depicts high blood pressure as a silent killer as it has no outward signs for many people. The creative headline is ‘Don’t let a stroke be the first sign you have high blood pressure’.

In October, phase two of the Fight Stroke campaign will commence with a call to action being delivered to the Federal Government. At that time we will be asking those who have joined the fight to contact their MPs, write to their local papers and call talk back to continue the conversations that this advertisement has started. To date more than 1300 people have signed up and this is growing daily.

As a charity, the NSF relies on the generosity of the media networks for pro-bono space to maximise the exposure of advertisements to our target audience. We understand this advertisement has been rated ‘M’ by CAD and has restricted viewing times. It is our understanding all advertisements shown during the two weeks in September were during M rated periods – ie after 8.30pm in the evening and before 5.30 am or between 12 and 3pm during the day. It was not school holidays during this period. All our advertising decisions have been made to minimise the impact of this advertisement on children whilst reaching our

target audiences.

In conclusion, we recognise our approach for this new National Stroke Foundation campaign might be viewed as confrontational. However, we strongly believe the portrayal is justifiable in the context of the severity, and high instance of stroke in Australia. For Australia's second biggest killer, stroke does not have high levels of awareness, and therefore does not receive the necessary attention or action in the community, or in government. We hope our campaign, with our 'fightstroke' rally cry, will in part begin to address this imbalance with our new campaign for the sake of the health of the Australian community. Further, all decisions were taken in consultation with the community, including an advisory board of stroke survivors and carers.

We hope you view our response favourably, and recognise our long history of community health education communication on stroke, and recognise that whilst confrontational, our new approach is necessary to help us continue to fight the significant challenge of reducing the incidence of stroke in Australia.

THE DETERMINATION

The Advertising Standards Board (“Board”) considered whether this advertisement breaches Section 2 of the Advertiser Code of Ethics (the “Code”).

The Board noted the complainants’ concerns that the advertisement depicts graphic images that are terrifying and unsuitable for viewing.

The Board viewed the advertisement and noted the advertiser’s response.

The Board considered whether the advertisement was in breach of Section 2.3 of the Code. Section 2.3 of the Code states: “Advertising or Marketing Communications shall not present or portray violence unless it is justifiable in the context of the product or service advertised”.

The Board noted that the presenter of the advertisement is portrayed as a menacing character, dressed in black and shown against a dark background. In front of the presenter are several silver food domes in a row, likened to a food cloche. As the presenter is describing the impacts of a stroke on the human brain, he removes the lid of a cloche revealing a human brain. The presenter then takes a scalpel and proceeds to slice into the brain, commenting that certain physical functions have now been rendered useless due to stroke. As he continues to detail statistics on the number of people either killed or affected by stroke, the presenter is then portrayed as removing another dome, picking up a hammer and smashing the sample brain.

At the end of the advertisement the website appears on screen with no voiceover address www.fightagainststroke.

The Board noted that the advertisement is very confronting and is intended to be alarming in order to draw the attention of the audience to the message being delivered. The Board noted that the advertisement is the first step in a strategy designed to raise awareness about stroke and the impact it can have and that the Board does allow a higher level of violence in advertisements with a strong public health message.

The Board considered that in this advertisement the viewer does not see the man actually hit the brain with the mallet but that the intention is evident and that his manner and demeanor prior to that point, as well as his facial expressions in the action of hitting the brain and the menacing tone of his voice combine to form an image that is likely to cause alarm and distress to viewers who may not understand the message being delivered in regard to stroke.

The Board noted the advertiser's response outlining the advertisement had been provide with an M rating by CAD and that the creative strategy for the campaign is designed to achieve a higher level of audience/ community recognition. The Board acknowledged the objective of the campaign in regard to the impacts of stroke on the Australian community and acknowledged the important health message that is intended to be conveyed in the advertisement. The Board considered however that in this instance there is a lack of information in the advertisement about how to avoid, fight or recognize the symptoms of stroke. The Board felt that this lack of a "call to action" for the viewer meant that the aggression and violence shown within the advertisement was not delivered in the context of a message about what to do in the case of stroke, how to identify the symptoms or any other information to guide the viewer and was not justified in the context of the advertisement.

The Board noted that in Case 108/09 the Board had upheld a complaint about a Government of Western Australia community service advertisement. In that case the Board noted the Code does not permit violence to be shown in advertisements unless it is relevant to the product or service advertised. The Board noted that although many public health and safety campaigns depict graphic and violent images and the Board finds these images permitted under the Code on the basis of the important public health and safety message that they convey, advertisements must still ensure that they do not contain violence that breaches community standards.

In the Board's view the advertisement presents violence in a manner that is not justifiable in the context of the product being advertised.

The Board determined that the advertisement did breach Section 2.3 of the Code.

Finding that the advertisement did breach Section 2.3 of the Code, the Board upheld the complaint.

ADVERTISER RESPONSE TO DETERMINATION

The following steps have been taken as a result of the complaint number 0397/12 being upheld.

There is no bought advertising scheduled for this campaign for the remainder of 2012. In addition, a letter has been sent to CAD advising them of the ASB decision and we have contacted our media agency and advised them the commercials cannot be run in their current format.

The following steps will be taken to rectify the advertisements prior to seeking reclassification and buying media. The advertisement will be modified to strengthened the call to action and ensure the level of violence is commensurate with a strong public health message – this will include a clear message to direct people where to go to find out if they are at risk and what they can do to prevent stroke. We will also consider the ending of the advertisement to see if we can reduce the impact of the hammer.

The decision to take the approach that we took was not made overnight nor taken lightly. After more than ten years of tireless campaigning to ensure services are available to reduce the impact of stroke on all Australians, a recent survey showed that only 6% of people thought it was a health concern. This is coupled with the fact that people affected by stroke are often unable to get appropriate care and support because it is not a high priority for government either. We know things should be better than this but could not get people to understand the impact that stroke has on individuals and those affected by it. People did not hear any stroke related messages. This campaign has certainly got people to talk about stroke.

It was never our intention to cause upset or cause distress to viewers and we will certainly take this feedback on board and modify the advertisement to meet the advertising standard guidelines