

Industry Paper

Raising Public Awareness as a Permanent Impact Instrument: The World Thrombosis Day Movement

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Practitioner Report

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ABSTRACT: The World Thrombosis Day (WTD) is a public awareness campaign led by the International Society on Thrombosis and Haemostasis (ISTH) aimed at increasing global understanding, prevention and treatment. The campaign was launched in 2014 after a systematic review of the literature showed that venous thromboembolism (VTE) causes a major burden of disease across low-income, middle-income and high-income countries.

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Background and History

World Thrombosis Day (WTD), a public awareness campaign of the International Society on Thrombosis and Haemostasis (ISTH), focuses on increasing global understanding, prevention and treatment of the often overlooked and misunderstood condition of thrombosis. WTD takes place annually on 13 October, the birthday of physician and pathologist Rudolf Virchow. In 2023, the campaign celebrates an important milestone with its 10th anniversary.

Thrombosis, commonly referred to as blood clots, can form in, or travel to, the blood vessels in the limbs, lungs, brain, heart and kidneys. Blood clots are also the common underlying pathology for ischemic heart disease, ischemic stroke and venous thromboembolism (VTE).

The prevalence of blood clots has been extensively documented. The Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors (GBD) Study 2010 (Rodin & de Ferranti, 2012) documented that ischemic

heart disease and stroke collectively caused one in four deaths worldwide. The GBD Study 2010 did not report data for VTE as a cause of death and disability, therefore the ISTH WTD Steering Committee—comprised of 14 international experts in the field of thrombosis and hemostasis—conducted a systemic review of the literature on the global disease burden caused by VTE, specifically in low-income, middle-income and high-income countries. The findings were published in the *Journal of Thrombosis and Haemostasis (JTH)* in 2014 in conjunction with the official launch of the inaugural WTD campaign (ISTH Steering Committee for World Thrombosis Day, 2014).

The review found that studies from Western Europe, North America, Australia and southern Latin America (Argentina) yielded consistent annual incidence rates ranging from 0.75 to 2.69 per 1,000 individuals in the population. The incidence increased to between 2 and 7 per 1,000 among those aged ≥ 70 years. Additionally, VTE associated with hospitalization was the leading cause of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) lost in low-income and middle-income countries, and the second most common cause in high-income countries, being responsible for more DALYs lost than nosocomial pneumonia, catheter-related bloodstream infections and adverse drug events.

The findings were clear: VTE causes a major burden of disease across low-income, middle-income and high-income countries. In addition, the ISTH commissioned a global awareness survey conducted by Ipsos-Reid between 22 July and 5 August 2014. Approximately 800 respondents were surveyed in their native language from Argentina, Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, Thailand, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States to measure general awareness of thrombosis, including deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism (PE). The findings revealed that overall, the proportion of respondents that were aware of conditions including thrombosis, DVT and PE (68%, 44% and 54%, respectively) was lower than the proportion of respondents aware of other thrombotic disorders, such as heart attack and stroke (88% and 85%, respectively). In addition, awareness was lower as compared to other health conditions such as hypertension, breast cancer, prostate cancer and AIDS (90%, 85%, 82% and 87%, respectively).

Although there was variation across countries, lower awareness was associated with a younger age and being male. Only 45% of respondents were aware that blood clots were preventable, and awareness of cancer, hospitalization and surgery as blood clot risk factors was low (16%, 25% and 36%, respectively). This data, coupled with the fact no existing global awareness days were making a concerted effort to recognize and advocate for blood clot awareness and prevention, clearly illustrated a need for the establishment of WTD.

Campaign Objectives

The primary goal of WTD is to build public awareness of VTE including its causes, risk factors, signs and symptoms, and evidence-based prevention and treatment. Secondly, the campaign seeks to educate healthcare professionals globally to increase their knowledge and practice of VTE risk assessments in the hospital. Led by a global scientific steering committee, WTD ultimately works to reduce death and disability caused by the condition.

Importantly, the mission of WTD aligns with and supports the World Health Assembly's (WHA) global target of reducing premature deaths by non-communicable disease (NCD) by 25% by 2025, as

well as the World Health Organization's (WHO) Thirteenth General Programme of Work 2019–2023, the Montevideo Roadmap 2018-2030 on NCDs and the Political Declaration of UNGA' Third High-level Meeting on NCDs.

More specifically, WTD pursues the following objectives:

- Highlight the impact of blood clots and highlight the need for action, specifically underscoring the unrecognized threat and serious consequences (morbidity and mortality) related to VTE and atrial fibrillation (AFib).
- Increase public awareness of the significance of blood clots, including the risks, signs and symptoms, specifically VTE and AFib as an important cause of thromboembolic stroke.
- Empower individuals to talk with their healthcare providers about their risk for blood clots and appropriate prevention. Encourage individuals to seek immediate medical attention if they have signs and symptoms.
- Provide relevant educational resources to healthcare professionals to maximize patient care and help save lives.
- Galvanize organizations and individuals in countries across the globe to conduct appropriate and aligned campaigns in their countries and regions.
- Advocate for “systems of care” to properly prevent, diagnose and treat blood clots and AFib.

Strategies for Global Impact

From the campaign's inception, the ISTH set out to be the primary convener of WTD, to galvanize and support global partners and to energize a collective drive around the world to increase awareness and action through educational activities for the public and health professionals throughout the year. At the heart of WTD are hundreds of thrombosis and hemostasis societies, patient advocacy groups, medical/scientific organizations, hospitals/institutions and other interested parties from around the world.

WTD launched in 2014 with 175 partners across some 50 countries and achieved 150+ million impressions worldwide. Since then, the WTD community has grown to more than 5,000 partners in 120 countries conducting more than 11,000 activities in 2022, giving the campaign an impact of more than 10.5 billion total impressions.

With the campaign's primary focus on hospital-associated VTE, the COVID-19 pandemic contributed significantly to building awareness. It thrust the topic of blood clots onto the global health agenda and the media spotlight and the campaign responded succinctly with spokespeople providing accurate medical information for the general public, health care professionals and public officials. As a result of the ISTH's longstanding work and existing relationships with its members, global public health organizations and the media, the Society was well-positioned as the leading global expert authority on blood clots and their association with COVID-19, as well as thrombotic side effects of certain COVID-19 vaccines.

WTD efforts were further amplified by the Society's increasing partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO), culminating in a symposium hosted at the ISTH 2022 Congress in London on

advancing global health policy on VTE prevention. WTD was invited to serve on an expert panel to provide up-to-date technical input and novel evidence that may inform WHO's work on the treatment of COVID-19-related VTE.

While WTD is a single day on 13 October dedicated to awareness building, the movement is recognized year-round, with awareness-building activities and efforts taking place each month. The most recent 2022 campaign strategy was based on the following elements:

- Create meaningful, educational activities monthly throughout the year to raise awareness of thrombosis.
- Provide campaign partners with new resources to create a significant local and global impact.
- Conduct new scientific research to improve patient outcomes and educate healthcare professionals.
- Connect with patients and survivors to provide opportunities to share stories and connect within a global community.
- Spearhead a global media relations effort to spread awareness of the signs, symptoms and risk factors of thrombosis.

This strategy has not only helped to build important public awareness capacities around the world, but it has also assisted the ISTH with the creation of thousands of new partnerships, further positioning the Society as the authority in the field of thrombosis.

Over the past 10 years, the WTD campaign has received 15 awards from the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE), the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and others. The International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) and the BestCities Global Alliance awarded the WTD campaign the Incredible Impacts Award for 2017. WTD also won the International and European Association Awards in the category of 'Best Social Media Campaign' for the same year.

Strategies for Global Impact

With the long-term goal to reduce the global burden and toll of the disease, the most important change agents are information, education, awareness and actions. The impact report of the WTD 2022 campaign activities highlights the following outputs:

- 2 global webinars with 1,061 registrants
- 8 streaming video events with 835,665 views
- 31 official WTD events
- 11,000 partner events across 123 countries
- 6 Reddit Ask Me Anything (AMA) events
- 250 survivor stories shared and 2,000 total submissions
- 622,667 campaign video views
- 145 million campaign hashtag impressions
- 540 million social media impressions
- 234 million social influencer impressions

- 46 million Twitter Chat impressions
- 146 million people reached on social media
- 230.8 million paid media impressions
- 9.5 billion global media impressions.

In addition to these outcomes, the WTD 2022 campaign expanded its reach across social media by collaborating with influencers and hosting interactive partner events, webinars and educational videos—all reaching nearly 1 billion people.

Through the leadership of the WTD Steering Committee, the campaign continued to advance the understanding, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of thrombosis through knowledge creation via science and research. Additional scientific outcomes included:

- Held a symposium at the ISTH 2022 Congress with the WHO focused on advancing global health policy on VTE prevention nationally and at the WHO.
- Led a global survey on VTE awareness among patients with cancer and published preliminary results in the *Journal of Thrombosis and Haemostasis (JTH)* in October.
- Issued a call to action published in *Research and Practice in Thrombosis and Haemostasis (RPTH)* on removing MTHFR polymorphisms as part of thrombophilia testing, along with publishing supplementary materials.
- Released four “Ask the Expert” videos, including one in French, to share information and education on thrombosis-related topics.

The WTD campaign’s overarching impact was ultimately achieved by:

- Strategizing the best media relations tactics with research, data and facts driven by the expertise of the steering committee.
- Expanding the campaign to include new, creative tactics that make a larger impact and will elevate the campaign into future years.
- Collaborating with key influencers, both blood clot survivors and medical experts, to share a unique first-hand perspective that cast a wide net of new followers for the campaign.

With creative campaign storytelling highlighting the lives of patients, collaborations with organizations and a comprehensive media program that achieved more than 10.5 billion impressions, the campaign soared to new heights and it is poised for its 10th anniversary in 2023.

Conclusion

The typical impact research focuses on an initial trigger (e.g., a policy, investment, organizational change, event) analyzing the impulses and the ripple effects into an organization or its ecosystem. The case of the WTD campaign shows a different configuration: the events around the WTD campaign on October 13, as well as the annual ISTH Congress, represent important anchors for the entire mission and strategic objectives of the organizing Society. However, the year-round engagement and activities, together with more than 11,000 partner organizations around the globe, are the main instruments driving the awareness goals and help build on-the-ground capacities for impact.

WTD's contributions to building knowledge through science, research and publications are one component. The wider dissemination of insights into health policies, prevention measures and individual stories relies on different instruments and channels: smaller events in various forms in many different countries in the world, organized in collaboration with local partners.

As part of this, the ISTH provides a strong backbone for the overall campaign direction, social media activities, campaigning, shared stories of survivors, resources in multiple languages and various information materials for different target groups. One of the core outcome measures is media contacts, impressions and page views. Event participation and surveys on awareness are also used to monitor the impact of the Society's activities. The reach and influence of the WTD campaign are analyzed every year and summarized in an annual impact report.

As WTD recognizes its 10th anniversary in 2023, the campaign appreciates its impact and growth over the past decade. Yet, there is more work to be done. WTD continues its forward march in its mission to reduce death and disability caused by thrombosis.

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