

STATEMENT

Prof. Dr. Michael Kunze

The importance of social marketing campaigns & the Austrian success story

One way to effectively offer preventive services such as vaccination to the general public is by means of social marketing. An excellent example of the social marketing of a vaccine is the Austrian tick-borne encephalitis (TBE) vaccination campaign. With 3.5 to 8.8 hospitalized cases per 100,000 inhabitants, Austria had one of the highest incidences of TBE in Central Europe. Since 1981, Austria has witnessed the remarkable success story of TBE vaccination: An organized mass vaccination program performed over the past 26 years has made it possible to largely contain this severe disease.

This success has been the result of two basic elements: a highly effective vaccine with a protection rate of 99% and a long-term continuous social marketing program. The experience with TBE gathered in Austria demonstrates the need and importance of this public health tool. Preventive services, such as vaccines, need to be promoted, and they cannot be optimal unless the findings of modern communication sciences are put to most favorable use. Today, social marketing is an essential and indispensable tool of science-oriented social medicine as it strives to integrate the concept of disease prevention into public health care. The ISW-TBE (www.ISW-TBE.info) provides the scientific background to public health recommendations on various topics, such as TBE in children, TBE and the golden agers, or TBE and travelers.

Even though Austria has successfully contained TBE, social marketing has to continue. One of the main future challenges will be to change the general perception of TBE vaccination from being a measure for people living in endemic regions to general vaccination of the entire population. Especially among people traveling from non-endemic countries to endemic areas, there is still a lack of awareness of the disease, and this will have to be redressed across Europe with social marketing campaigns and the publication of patient case reports.