Message Lab – a platform for research and improvement of public health messages

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Relevance and importance to patients
The aim of the Message Lab is to help improve how evidence-based public health messages are communicated, so that the messages and underlying research are informative and correctly understood by patients and the public.

Background
Well-designed public health messages can make people aware of what they can do (or not do) for their health and help them to make informed choices. On the other hand, poorly designed messages can confuse people, lead to poorly-informed decisions, and diminish trust in health authorities and research.

Objectives
To set up a platform to facilitate the design and evaluation of public health messages.

Methods
Our starting point is evidence-based guidance for effective health communication, including the use of simple and familiar wording, clear visual design, and careful testing in target audiences. We will prioritise questions together with an international advisory group, focusing on important uncertainties about how best to communicate information about the effects of health interventions. These include, for example, how to communicate uncertainty about effects, the use of positive versus negative framing for different types of decisions, and the use of visual displays of intervention effects.

We identified recruitment platforms that can be used for online randomized trials and platforms for user testing. We assessed these based on several criteria. We then tested selected platforms in a randomized trial comparing three ways of communicating the overall uncertainty of effects and comparing including the margin of error (confidence interval) to not including it.

Results
In this presentation we will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of different user testing and recruitment platforms for online randomized trials, and we will present the findings of our trial of different ways of communicating the uncertainty of effects.
Conclusions

The Message Lab offers an efficient way for researchers to test different methods of communicating public health messages and for health authorities to design public health messages that are effectively communicated.