

5 – Addressing Rumors or Myths and Role in Vaccine Safety Events

Storyline:

The immunization program has been going well until a rumor begins that one child in a community far from the capital has become sick after receiving a vaccine. The rumor is becoming stronger every day and is picking up coverage on local radio.

Concerned that the rumor might make caregivers concerned about bringing their children for vaccination, a few frontline workers (FLWs) go to the house of the children who fell sick. They find out from the child's mother that she never thought her son was sick due to the vaccination he received. The mother agrees to speak to other caregivers during a community gathering to explain that her son's illness was not caused by his vaccination. She also responds to a few questions to reassure other caregivers about the safety and advantages of immunization.

Characters:

Regina	The main character who is an FLW
Hakeem	An FLW in Regina's team
Sani	An FLW in Regina's team
Efe	Doreen's son who is almost 18 months old
Doreen	A caregiver who's child is allegedly sick
Amber	A caregiver in the community
Sa'id	A caregiver in the community
Gino	A caregiver in the community

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Scene 1- Exterior – A village market

(Story opens in a village market and several people are going about buying things from small shops. Two women (Gino and Amber) are seen talking while buying vegetables from a vendor. Another person is seen in the shop next to them overhearing the conversation.)

Amber: Gino, did you hear what happened last week? My sister-in-law saw Doreen picking up her child Efe from his kindergarten class in the middle of the day and hurrying home. She said the child looked sick.

Gino: Oh really? Doreen had mentioned that Efe was running a fever after his vaccinations last week. Do you think he fell very sick after getting his vaccinations?

Amber: That is what my sister-in-law thought too. Otherwise why would Doreen pick him in the middle of the day. My sister-in-law also said that some of her friends heard that some other children have also fallen sick after these vaccinations.

Gino: That's too bad.

(Hakeem is seen in the shop next door overhearing the conversation and shaking his head. By the time he can come to say something to Amber and Gino they have left the shop and he can't find them in the crowd. He continues to walk through the market and bumps into two colleagues Regina and Sani. Regina looks very happy and starts to talk in an excited voice.)

Regina: Hi Hakeem! Sani and I just finished an outreach visit to the community and I'm really happy about how we have done this month. The caregivers in our community seem quite receptive to our efforts to motivate them to bring their children for immunization. I really believe that the improvements we made this year in planning made a huge difference.

Hakeem: Yes, I've noticed that as well. The community has been much more open and welcoming to the idea of fully immunizing their children. However, I did hear something strange today.

Regina: What's that?

Hakeem: You know Doreen right? Who lives near the school-

Regina: (nods)

Hakeem: Well, today some women at the community market were saying that Doreen's child has fallen sick since he received our vaccines. I overheard some loose talk and fear mongering about vaccines.

Regina: But that's outrageous! Why didn't you intervene and talk to them, Hakeem?

Hakeem: I tried to but lost them in the crowd. Anyway, it's just a rumor, Regina, we shouldn't worry about it too much.

Regina: We **do** need to worry about it, Hakeem. We can't dismiss this news as a rumor without finding the root cause to the child's illness.

Hakeem: And what if it is really just a rumor? In fact I saw Doreen the other day and she didn't say anything about the child being sick.

Regina: Even so, rumors and myths like these spread like wildfire, and are extremely counterproductive to our work. This can turn into something really big if we don't address this right now.

Sani: Regina's right. A patient asked me about this too, she heard this on the radio.

Regina: Its already on the radio?! That's not good at all. We have to address this right away before this spreads any more.

Hakeem: Hmm...okay, what do you suggest we do then?

Regina: First let's make sure the child is okay, and then we can address the matter of the vaccines.

Hakeem: Excellent! Let's go talk to the mother tomorrow.

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Scene 2 – Exterior – Doreen’s House

(Regina and Hakeem visit Doreen’s house. They knock on the door.)

Hakeem: Hi, how are you, Doreen?

Doreen: Hi, may I help you?

Regina: I am Regina and this is Hakeem – you may remember us - we are the health workers from your local health facility.

Doreen: Of course I do. Please come on in.

Regina: Thank you. Doreen, we just wanted to discuss your family’s health with you. We got news that your son, Efe has been unwell, and-

Doreen: Oh yeah, Efe was running a fever after his last vaccination and I was a bit worried. But it ended up being a mild fever and went away within a day. Efe was fine the very next day and even went to day-care.

Hakeem: Oh, we’re so glad he is ok. There was a rumor that he was unwell. I heard some people talking that he fell sick after he got his vaccination and had to be rushed home from day-care. That is also turning into an anti-immunization movement on the local radio.

Doreen: Nonsense! My son is healthier than ever before. My husband and I are so glad to have gotten him vaccinated.

Regina: I am very happy to hear that, Doreen. If people could hear this from you, I am sure it would help to eliminate the rumor.

Doreen: Of course. You know how grateful I am to our health facility and to our health workers. You have all cared for the community’s children like they are your own. I will be happy to help dispel these rumors.

Hakeem: Thank you so much Doreen! I’ll arrange for you to speak on the radio to dispel these myths. Your voice and perspective as a mother who recently gave her child vaccinations will go a long way in dispelling these rumors.

Regina: And I’ll arrange for a community meeting where together we will explain the situation and importance of immunization to our neighbors and community members in-person.

Scene 3 – Exterior – Community Center

(The health facility staff, Doreen, and several other caregivers are gathered in the community center veranda)

Doreen: Hello, everyone.

Sa’id: Hi, Doreen. Why have you gathered us here? And why are these health workers with you? We heard that their vaccines made your son sick.

Doreen: Calm down, Sa’id. This is exactly what I wanted to address. My child is not sick. He is a healthy 18 month old who is full of energy. In fact, he has been a picture of good health lately - ever since we got him fully immunized.

Gino: But you told me that he fell sick after the vaccinations and that you were worried about it!

Doreen: Yes Gino, I was a bit worried that day but it turned out to be a mild fever – a normal side effect – and lasted less than a day. He was fine to go to day-care the next day and was not sick at all. I’m sorry I should have come back to tell you that he was fine.

Amber: Then why did you take him out of his day-care so abruptly? Last week my sister saw you picking up Efe in the middle of the day and hurrying home.

Doreen: Oh Amber, that was not because he was sick. That was because my sister-in-law and her kids were passing through town for just a few hours and they dropped in to say hello. They had not seen Efe

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in a long time, so I got permission from his teacher to take Efe home early so he can meet his aunty and cousins.

Amber: Oh, so you didn't take him home because he got sick after vaccination?

Doreen: No Amber, those are just rumors.

Sa'id: To be honest, we heard from other sources too that these vaccines are not good for our children.

Regina: I understand your concern, but I give my own children these vaccinations. If there was any chance that they were harmful, I wouldn't give them to my own children, would I? These vaccines are given to our children so that they can be protected from certain very harmful diseases. Some of those diseases are even incurable. We are lucky that we have vaccines to protect our children from them.

Amber: If these vaccines are given to children to help them fight diseases, why do they make some kids sick?

Regina: Amber, your question is valid. In some cases, the vaccines present certain side-effects like mild fever and soreness. But, with just a little bit of care, they are perfectly manageable.

Doreen: That's right! My son only experienced a mild fever and soreness at the site of the injection-

Gino: And you're saying, ever since then, he's been healthy?

Doreen: Healthier, in fact! He doesn't fall ill, like my sister-in-law's children – they haven't been vaccinated, mind you. I'd urge you all to please listen to our health workers and do as I did, for your children too.

Regina: My colleagues and I are always available to answer any questions you may have.

Doreen: Initially I had concerns too and asked the health workers lots of questions which they answered patiently. If you hear any rumors then bring it to the attention of our health workers so they can address it immediately, before it spreads like wild fire.

Hakeem: That's right. Even I realized that a small passing rumor can become a huge ugly monster that will be hard to control. It was a good thing that Regina decided to address it right away. We should all be vigilant and report any rumors as soon as possible and address them right away.

[fade out]

The End.