

VACCINES, NOT JUST SCIENCE. THE ROLE OF THE HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION**Bravo E.***Journalist, Director of Cícero Comunicación. Communication and Public Relations Agency*

Introduction It is today unquestionable that vaccines are experiencing a crisis of confidence and credibility with regard to public opinion in different regions of the world. In this context, we have seen a flourishing of anti-vaccine groups – including those comprising healthcare professionals- whose arguments are gradually seeping into the media sphere. As a result of this, the fear, confusion and doubt over the true value of vaccines is progressively gaining ground among a large part of civil society in many countries. The example of the vaccine for human papillomavirus is definitely among those which best illustrate the issue raised here.

Consideration Should there be a response to all the attacks of the anti-vaccine groups? Before answering, let's think... Do we have a response? Will we be capable of transmitting it effectively? Do we really wish to transmit it? Do we understand that not everyone needs the same response? I also wonder whether we are prepared to renounce the rationale of science in order to communicate emotionally, which is what really influences the human being's habits, attitudes and behaviours either at an individual level or as a member of a community. These questions and others must be posed before implementing any strategy and action plan in the environment of what we call "crisis communication". Communication represents the essential tool for building reputation and destroying it and the reputation of vaccines is currently endangered.

Conclusions Healthcare professionals bear a great responsibility for popularising science as a basis for health education. Beyond the scientific forums where evidence is required to validate an argument, the transmission of a message that gets through to the public needs a painstaking strategic and tactical approach, especially in contentious and polemical contexts. For you, as healthcare professionals, to know and master the key questions so you can transfer your knowledge to all corners of society is vital to highlight to public opinion, not just something as prized as vaccines, but any other breakthrough in the world of medicine.