

Can Graphic Design Really Save Your Life?

Explore the association of wellbeing and personal growth in design in your discussion.

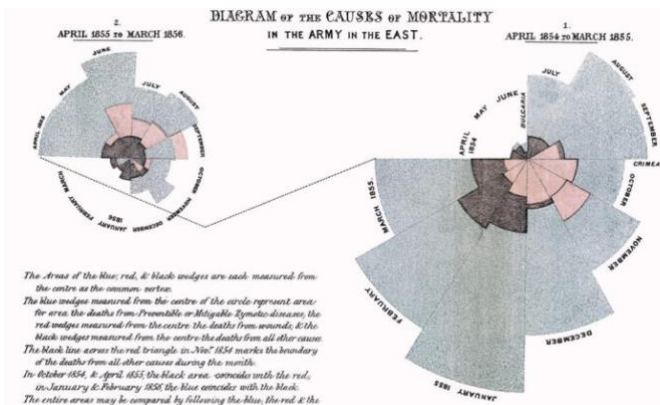
Student Number: 2003725

BA Graphic Design

Word Count: 2488

Lecturer's Name: Donna Williams

The function of Graphic design is to create solutions, to communicate, influence and inspire a large mass of people. Speaking on behalf of designers, it is our responsibility to deliver the carefully crafted visual information so that it forms curiosity for the viewer, to ponder over an



important message and to an extent, make lives more interesting and meaningful. Can this be powerful enough to change someone's perspective of life? Or even to save it?

(Nightingale, 1858)

For nearly over two centuries, graphic design infographics continue to deliver potential 'life saving' visual data. Florence Nightingale intended on showing Queen Victoria a visual representation of the causes of mortality of the British during the Crimean War, in order to acquire more war medicine and other medical equipment. In result of this, this infographic succeeded to equip the British with more the needed supplies, and before long, infographics began becoming popular to emphasise statements. Multimedia journalist, Murray Dick, states that "...the earliest examples were intended to inform discussion and debate among an elite social sphere, they also sought to address real-world problems." (Dick, 2020). This is but one of the examples of lifesaving graphics to be shared, albeit one of the first. With such an obvious early influence of the attention-grabbing concept of design having a major contribution in the wellbeing of humanity, we can already see how it may have a potential role in saving lives.



(Orphanides, 2016)

In 2015, the Zika virus began to spread across several nations rapidly. Here is a picture of a billboard, created by Posterscope and NBS, set up to spread awareness to help combat the virus. The way in which the graphics impacts lives has clearly developed from its earliest form, as this poster demonstrates a more impactful style of design rather than a literal portrayal of data as seen previously. However, they both save lives by raising awareness of the severity of their individual situation by illustrating numerical information visually, in the first, the number of deaths, and the second; the number of deadly mosquitos present. I think this poses an interesting concept as it combines art and design with a physical concept, the kind of innovative ideas that encapsulate an audience and spread information efficiently. In the world of graphic design, these types of concepts come hand in hand with design thinking; therefore this poses another way in which graphic design can save your life as it encourages this type of progressive thinking and stand out idea generation.



(Kraft, 2016)

Designers have come up with many different strategies to prevent people from smoking. A commonly used strategy is to display graphic warning images on cigarette packages. Hart Blanton, and others from the University of Connecticut, conducted a social experiment to see whether graphic warning images really do lower smoking-related intentions. The experiment consisted of

“1,169 Americans ages 18–24, who were randomly assigned either to view nine GWs (Graphic Warnings) designed by the FDA or to a no-label control. Both the intention to smoke in the future and the intention to quit smoking (among smokers) were assessed before and after message exposure.”

The results show that

“GWs lowered intention to smoke in the future among those with a moderate lifetime smoking history (between 1 and 100 cigarettes), and they increased intention to quit smoking among those with a heavy lifetime smoking history (more than 100 cigarettes).” (Blanton H, 2014)

In discussion of Blanton's experiment, to an extent, he proves that Graphic Design does impact on our personal health and wellbeing, as there is a strong correlation between reduction in smokers and the images produced on the packaging.

However, 31.26 million deaths were caused by cardiovascular diseases, Cancers, and respiratory diseases across the world in 2017 (Roser, 2018) which certifies that Blanton's hypothesis doesn't cover all people. But the use of graphics clearly has some impact on whether people choose to partake in this health damaging habit, which could in turn does save lives.



(pearlfisher, 2011)

Up until 2011, reading and identifying the packaging on medication has proved confusing for many. This package design for Help Remedies Pharmaceutical company, made by Pearlfisher, makes it even easier to identify and differentiate medication packaging and

instructions. Jonathan Ford, Pearlfisher Creative Partner, mentions “We have refined the identity and colour coded the embossed pill shape to make the overall brand architecture more visually strong and to give the brand better stand-out and immediacy of recognition.” Alongside “...an ownable secondary language through the pill iconography, that will be used across further brand touchpoints and communications.” (Ford, 2011) Pearlfisher has created a brand language so distinct for its concise personality and colour coordinated boxes, it has built a relationship between the product and the public all around the world, as stats show that there was 1000% increase in sales in 2011 and 150% increase in distribution. The clever packaging doesn’t just make it easier to identify the public’s needed medication in shops, but also proves that to an extent, it can save lives as it lessens the time spent suffering whilst looking for the correct pharmaceutical drugs. Pearlfisher has also certainly underlined that less is sometimes better.

This study also helps us to understand that design techniques really do have a social responsibility, and that designers themselves possess the ability to implicate these techniques by understanding their consumer, and how to not only convince them of a concept, but provide accessibility. Accessibility issues affect the wellbeing of many, and to consider the public’s needs, especially in this example, again, highlights the role of design in saving lives.

Graphic design does in fact possess the ability to guide us to a certain location, stop us at a crossing, continuously catches our attention, safely and efficiently. As well as physical well-being, graphic design also possesses the ability to positively impact mental well-being and personal growth. Tanya Knight says that “Self-development is the constant process of improving yourself, including working toward better wellness.” And “Wellness is not just

about your physical self but about your mental, emotional, and social welfare, too.” (Knight, 2019) This statement shows that wellbeing expands beyond the physical and its important to consider the realms of mental health when considering the concept of saving lives. Mental health is so important for survival, for happy communities, for productivity, positive mental health, and attitude towards it, is essential for human existence.



Images based on: '8 Ways to improve your mental health today' by Nicole Marie
Thriftyvintagefashion.blogspot.co.uk

(Marie, 2016)

Graphics can offer a simplistic visual representation of advice on improving mental health. The brightly coloured and simple visuals in this poster allow the audience to feel as though this advice is more accessible and more cohesive with daily life. This is proven by modern medically reviewed research on colour psychology, as author and educational consultant, Kendra Cherry, states that “Research has demonstrated in many cases that the mood-altering effects of colour may only be temporary. A blue room may initially cause feelings of calm, but the effect dissipates after a short period of time.” (Cherry, 2020)

The importance of considering mental health as a serious issue to be more openly talked about has increased through time, and the use of graphics as a wellbeing tool has also expanded to this in our contemporary world. Issues such as anxiety and depression, not only disrupt one’s quality of life, but can develop to become life threatening to those suffering. Graphics can help humanity become more open about this subject matter and be the catalyst of life saving conversations. “Approximately 1 in 4 people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year. In England, 1 in 6 people report experiencing a common mental health problem (such as anxiety and depression) in any given week.” (Anon., 2017) This highlights the importance of addressing mental health when it comes to survival. Undoubtedly, graphics has played major part in allowing ease of access to information and played a part in dissolving mental health stigma that has been prevalent for many years.



(Anon., 1960)

This example of a poster from the 60s shows the state of discussion surrounding mental health at the time, a clearly taboo topic for many... the common advice was to just carry on and pick yourself up, arguably this approach would be effective in terms of avoiding dwelling in negative emotions, however, the ignorance of emotion can lead to suppressed feelings that disallow for the validation needed to encourage recovery. Although the attitude towards mental health was still far from progressive at this time, we can see at least a glimmer of the start of addressing these issues, especially post-war. The image above was from a “mid-century health book designed to help pupils learn more about emotions and their importance to self-adjustment and adjustment to others, offering guidance on developing skills for keeping mentally fit.” (Edelstein, 2013) Graphic design, even in the earliest examples of advice to combat these issues, was an effective way to convey information to the public, surrounding the topic. This really shows the implementation of mental health advice even in earlier stages of life, which can undeniably improve the quality of a person’s life and even save it! As we move forward in time, we see more politically charged and activism-based design calling for attention and serious consideration of mental health as a threat to one’s existence.



(Scher, 2020)

The Mental Health Coalition is a campaign that began in more recent years, that posed a more open approach to combatting mental health problems. The designer here has made use of striking colours and interesting symbolism within her work to open these conversations and reach out to a broad audience. “The square peg in a round hole symbolically represents there is no ‘normal’ when it comes to mental health and that everybody fits.” (Brewer, 2020) This imagery along with “the bright, modern colour palette [that] suggests the broad spectrum of mental health conditions [that] captures a sense of optimism and hope” (Batchelor, 2020) , not only does this, but captures a broader audience to look further into the meaning behind these posters, not only spreading awareness but in turn saving lives. Upon initial capture of attention, sparks further inquiry, and when the audience does so, they are met with numerous articles explaining the significance of these details, as well as a website cleverly designed to spread awareness and break the taboo surrounding mental health. “Paula Scher is known for her bold and attention-grabbing graphic design, so her arrival in the mental health sphere is not only unexpected, it’s an exciting and powerful call to action. In contrast to its peers in the

sector – largely summed up by soft tones and a gentler visual approach” (Brewer, 2020) this approach encapsulates a wider range within the audience, unlike previous mental health campaigns where there is still a fear to stand out.



(OrangeCrush, 2019)

At times, it can also be difficult to express feelings when a change of mood occurs, which in turn, requires professional help. Rachel Louise Hancock from Canterbury Christ Church University formulated research into whether it's possible that "...graphic design can enable the understanding of their [people's] thoughts and feelings, and create a platform from which a user can help improve their own mental wellbeing" (Hancock, 2020) Her methodology suggests that the use of an app/database, and the incorporation of colour to represent mood, harnesses design in order to simplify and make the tracking of feelings accessible. The user would be able to access information about their feelings, and also data graphs which can simplify self-understanding.



(Hancock, 2020)

She uses a style of qualitative research whereby the user uses self-reflection methods in order to collate their feelings, thus making it easier to spot patterns. It was also an experiment to understand whether the use of design could initiate research via communication of these accounts when expressed by data. It means that by learning habits “and to then utilis[ing] that learning as a means of allowing an audience to pursue a similar process to also better understand their mental health, and find ways to help improve mental wellbeing.” (Hancock, 2020) This research obtains potentially lifesaving information, as well as a potential method for the public to positively aid mental health. Again, mental health is one of the most important factors for survival, without looking after it, there becomes possibility for reduced quality of life and wellbeing. This academic journal identifies methods of design, and highlights the way in which it can be key to advancing the ways in which we look after our mental health.

To conclude her research, Hancock believes that “the development of a mobile app could be explored further as there is clear evidence from this research.” (Hancock, 2020) This shows

how design has an extremely important role in the key advancements in society. However, even though this seems to be the starting point and answer to avoid developing mental health issues, the method hasn't been proven to work on in every case as of yet. Thus suggesting, Graphic Design may not always have the answer. But undeniably has an influence as we can see through this piece of research. Breaking the stigma of mental health, and finding easy ways to ensure it stays healthy can undoubtedly be achieved via the use of design, because it simplifies the task of understanding oneself, and others. It also allows for data to be collected in order to provide a foreground for further research into the subject and how it may affect the general public.

Considering the outcomes of my research, it seems examples of the role of graphic design amongst personal development, health and wellbeing, are available in abundance. It shows that there are important aspects of graphic design that aid both physical and mental health, proving that there are ways in which it does save lives. From personal experience, design has allowed me to develop skills, and broaden my personal scope of interests, so not only does it play a role in personal growth and well-being from the observer's point of view, but also as the designer. Since starting the subject, graphic design has, and continues to demonstrate its impact on people's personal growth and wellbeing, which is without a doubt enough to inspire me to use this as a tool to come up with ideas of my own. As someone who has also dealt with mental health, Graphic design has certainly helped express myself in a positive way and has given me the opportunity to achieve something great with other people's lives in mind. Of course, there are other important factors in improving wellbeing, but as design enters the realm of public perception with ease, it can easily be used to spread information, change attitudes, and make complicated issues accessible, so its role is doubtlessly important. In conclusion there is an undeniable use for Graphic Design when considering wellbeing, but

also in the sense that without it, many lifesaving developments in the contemporary world would not have been made.

Bibliography

- Anon., 1960. *Vintage school book Illustration from "Todays Health"*. [Art] (Laidlaw Bros).
- Anon., 2016. *A beautiful chaos*. [Online]
Available at: <http://www.abeautifulchaos.co.uk/2016/05/8-simple-ways-to-improve-your-mental.html>
[Accessed 8 11 2021].
- Anon., 2017. *Mental health and statistics*, s.l.: Mind.org.
- Batchelor, L., 2020. *Pentagram uplifting brand for mental health*. [Online]
Available at: <https://leahbatchelor.wordpress.com/2020/05/25/pentagram-uplifting-brand-for-mental-health/>
[Accessed 19 11 2021].
- Blanton H, S. L. S. E. L. J., 2014. Effect of Graphic Cigarette Warnings on Smoking Intentions in Young Adults. *PLoS One*, Volume 9,5 e96315..
- Brewer, J., 2020. Pentagram's Paula Scher reveals powerful "anti-sanitarium" identity for the Mental Health Coalition. *It's Nice That*.
- Brewer, J., 2020. Pentagram's Paula Scher reveals powerful "anti-sanitarium" identity for the Mental Health Coalition. *It's Nice That*.
- Cherry, K., 2020. Color Psychology: Does It Affect How You Feel?. *Verywellmind*.
- Dick, M., 2020. Visualizing Data To Save Lives: A History of Early Public Health Infographics. *The Mit Press Reader*.
- Dictionary, M. W., n.d. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/save%20a%20life>
[Accessed 8 October 2021].
- Edelstein, S., 2013. Learning to Work Well With Others. *Envisioning The American Dream*.
- Ford, J., 2011. *Help Remedies by Pearlfisher* [Interview] 2011.
- Hancock, R. L., 2020. *Communicating Mental Health through Graphic Design*, s.l.: Canterbury Christ Church University.
- Knight, T., 2019 . *MindfulnessWomen.com*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.mindfulnesswomen.com/blog/5-ways-self-development-improves-your-health-amp-wellness>
[Accessed 19 October 2021].
- Kraft, R., 2016. *Kraft Elder Law*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.kraftelderlaw.com/study-suggests-smokers-more-likely-to-try-quit-when-seeing-graphic-warnings-on-cigarette-packs/>
[Accessed 8 11 2021].
- Marie, N., 2016. *A beautiful chaos*. [Online]
Available at: <http://www.abeautifulchaos.co.uk/2016/05/8-simple-ways-to-improve-your-mental.html>
[Accessed 8 11 2021].
- Murray, D., 2021. Visualizing Data To Save Lives: A History of Early Public Health Infographics. *The Mit Press Reader*.
- Nightingale, F., 1858. *Diagram of the causes of mortality in the army in the east*, s.l.: Florence Nightingale.
- Noorbakhsh, F., 2019. Zika Virus Infection, Basic and Clinical Aspects: A Review Article. *Iranian Journal of Public Health*.

Orphanides, K., 2016. *WIRED*. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/ad-billboard-traps-zika-mosquitoes>
[Accessed 8 11 2021].

pearlfisher, 2011. *Help Remedies Pharmaceutical company*. [Art].

Roser, H. R. a. M., 2018. Causes of Death. *Our World in Data*.

Scher, P., 2020. *The Mental Health Coalition Posters*. [Art].