

## **ABSTRACT**

ELIZABETH MORGAN WITHERSPOON: A Case Study of Agenda-Building Efforts  
of the National Asthma Education and Prevention Program  
and National Media's Agenda-Setting and Framing of Asthma, 1989-1999

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This study expands upon Rogers, Dearing, and Chang's (1991) model of the agenda-setting process and proposes a new model of agenda building and agenda setting for an issue. It examines both the role of public relations efforts by a government organization in building the agenda for a national public health issue and the content of media coverage of that issue from 1989 through 1999. The National Asthma Education and Prevention Program, a coalition of government and nonprofit health organizations supported by staff of the National Institutes of Health, has attempted to raise awareness about the growing prevalence of asthma, a growing major public health issue. Analysis of in-depth interviews with NAEPP staff found them to be practicing the public information model of public relations and focusing on limited tactical efforts rather than a comprehensive strategic national program. Analysis of NAEPP's information subsidies found them generally to be of poor basic quality and limited in their value as tools of agenda building. Quantitative analysis of media content of asthma news stories found an uneven pattern of frequency and prominence of news coverage about asthma, but a generally upward trend in the latter half of the time period; scant mention of NAEPP as a named source in asthma news stories; and a lack of increasing frequency of NAEPP messages about asthma over the period. Spikes in frequency and prominence of news coverage occurred in 1991 and 1997, the years that NAEPP released major clinical reports. Qualitative analysis of media content of selected asthma news stories supported prior research that the media frame issues (1) predominantly in episodic rather than thematic fashion (Iyengar, 1991); (2) according to the

paradigm of Entman (1993); (3) by using certain framing devices (Gamson, 1989); (4) by omitting certain information; (5) by using a double-standard of victim blaming regarding the poor and minorities; and (6) often through a pattern of mythical storytelling (Lule, 2001).

Implications of the results of this case study for public relations theory, practice, and education, news-editorial practice and education, and agenda building for major chronic health issues are discussed.