
The truth behind the #IceBucketChallenge

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These days the almost viral campaign *#IceBucketChallenge* promoted in the Internet has become top news. The campaign goal is to raise funds to fight Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS).

ALS is a degenerative disease that affects nerve cells of the backbone and brain. These cells control muscle activity; therefore, as the disease progresses, the muscles start degenerating until paralysis. Famous British Physicist Stephen Hawking (known for his black hole theory) suffers such disease.

It is not hard to perceive that suffering this disease (degenerative and incurable) is like a bucket of cold water. And this is the origin of the campaign name, born in mid-July in Boston by former baseball player Pete Frates, who also endures the disease.

The initiative provides a 24hrs margin to those who were challenged to pouring on themselves a bucket of cold water, invite 3 people to the challenge on the social networks, and donate some money to the ALS organization, based in the U.S. This organization is doing researches on ALS and does not have enough money to fulfill its mission: to offer protection, care, and help to people suffering from the disease.

Several famous people have joined this call. Some of them —Justin Timberlake, Ricky Martin, Jim Parsons, Lady Gaga, Cristiano Ronaldo, Mark Zuckerberg, Bill Gates, Oprah Winfrey, Thalía, Justin Bieber— have registered their actions in Facebook and Twitter.

Even President Barack Obama (who preferred to pay a donation) and a member of the Kennedy family have been invited to participate in this solidarity campaign to air the disease and help raising funds to fight it.

Prince Albert II of Monaco posted a video this week in his Facebook profile and after the cold water shower, he said to be “happy” to contribute with this project. Likewise, he nominated France President Francois Hollande, Norway Crown Prince Haakon, and American entrepreneur Philip Knight.

Only in the U.S., about 5,600 people are diagnosed with ALS each year, with an incidence of 2 out of every 100,000 inhabitants. Up to 30,000 American could endure the disease any time soon.

Although we can confirm this campaign has been successful—it has collected more than USD 14 millions—, we should ask ourselves: What will happen to those suffering from the disease in the U.S. when the money runs out?

The answer is simple. Those with no money will be left to their fate.

This is different in Cuba. While ALS patient in America are forced to conduct awareness-raising campaigns hoping for donations to finance treatments and research to find a cure, Cuba (the underdeveloped, blocked, and third-world country) allocates annually millions to scientific studies and guarantee free medical assistant to all citizens.

For instance, neurological tests, magnetic resonance, muscle biopsy, and electrophysiology studies that help to reach a correct diagnose and the extent of the brain involvement in an ALS patient in American and some European country can cost thousands of dollars. However, according to Professor Reinaldo Mustelier Becquer, MINSAP's Head of Neurology Service at the Neurology and Neurological Institute, Cuban patients benefit from free assistance and periodic assessment of their functional status, diet and physical activities directed by specialists.

In that context, one may ask: How many celebrities would join a campaign promoting an actual social and structural change in the private health system. A change where everyone, without distinction as social class, race, creed, political affiliation and economic status, could enjoy a universal, embracer, and free health system like that of Cuba.

A change, where victims of such disease will not depend on the success of an international crusade to "sensitize" in the Internet a moneyed and "helpful" minority—giving some pennies for free—, but a political will of their governments.

I am sure that sort of campaign will be worse than a bucket of cold water to some.

Cubasi Translation Staff
