[IE] Authority partially upholds complaints over cancer charity's advertising campaign

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The Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland (ASAI) has partially upheld complaints concerning elements of the Irish Cancer Society's "I want to get Cancer" advertising campaign. The advertisings proved particularly controversial, with 92 complaints submitted under various sections of the ASAI's Code against the six advertisements, which featured in various media including television and radio. The campaign started with a "teaser" advertisement "where the advertisers were not identified" and the wording "I want to get cancer" featured. The following day the "reveal" adverts appeared and "the identity of the Irish Cancer Society was revealed". The campaign featured two advertisements for television, which included several vignettes. One vignette featured a man sitting at a kitchen table visibly upset as he states "I want to get cancer and wring its neck".

The ASAI noted that "a common theme running through the complaints" was that the wording used "I want to get cancer" was "offensive, insensitive, disrespectful and upsetting". Some complainants stated that the initial "teaser" part of the campaign "had not identified who the advertiser was or the premise behind the advertisements", and only through the "reveal" part of the campaign was it evident "that the phrase had been a play on words".

In response to the ASAI, the Irish Cancer Society stated inter alia that the "campaign had been created as a public awareness campaign, designed to save lives, similar to the way the Road Safety Authority had undertaken hard-hitting campaigns to reduce the number of road deaths". The ASAI Complaints Committee in their assessment noted that the campaign started with "teaser" adverts followed by "reveal" adverts, and observed that while the Irish Cancer Society had indicated one of the main objectives of the Campaign had been "to create awareness among people of the things they could do to reduce of risk of getting cancer [...] the Campaign had not centred on these factors." The Committee considered that while "there was a tolerance in society for charity advertising to be more provocative than commercial advertising" nonetheless "care was needed when addressing such an emotive issue as cancer, particularly when using provocative copy." In reaching its decision the Complaints Committee "noted the level of complaint" and "the distress that had been caused to complainants", and held the "teaser" element of the campaign to be in breach of sections 3.3 (social responsibility), 3.20 (Decency and Propriety), and 3.23 (Fear and Distress) of the ASAI Code. In relation to the "reveal" element of the

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campaign, the Committee noted that while “some of the vignettes were very clear in explaining the context of the message”, “other vignettes in the television adverts” had been unclear as to what the individuals meant by wanting to “get cancer”, and were therefore likely to cause distress to consumers and were accordingly in breach of the Code.

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http://www.asai.ie/complaint/non-commercial-charities-fundraising/

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