

Service Review

Targeted Faith-based Disease Awareness Marketing

By John Mack

According to the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC's) Office of Minority Health, even though the Nation's infant mortality rate is down, the infant death rate among African Americans is still more than double that of whites. Heart disease death rates are more than 40 percent higher for African Americans than for whites. A disproportionate number of African Americans also suffer from diabetes, obesity, cancer, HIV/AIDS and asthma.

Other minorities are also at increased risk for a range of medical problems. Hispanics living in the United States, for example, are almost twice as likely to die from diabetes as are non-Hispanic whites. New cases of hepatitis and tuberculosis are higher in Asians and Pacific Islanders living in the United States than in whites.

This real minority medical situation is complicated by the fact that cultural, economic and other factors have sustained a low level of awareness for the heightened risk of these diseases among minority groups.



"Regardless of the specific population, there's a tremendous degree of apathy and denial around healthcare in general," says Jay Bolling, president of Roska Healthcare Advertising, "and pharmaceutical marketers who wish to target the right people, intercept them and

motivate them to action need to go beyond the traditional DTC approach."

A Multi-cultural Outreach Initiative

To address this problem, Roska Healthcare Advertising, in partnership with Healthy National Network (HNN) and Impact Health, recently formed the "Multi-cultural Outreach Initiative" to improve the disease awareness of African Americans and other minorities. The initiative is designed to provide the appropriate motivation to participants to seek treatment from their physicians for certain high-risk and life-threatening conditions. This targeted program involves a unique 'push/pull'



strategy that brings together key physician opinion leaders, faith-based organizations and targeted media to improve the health of minorities in their communities, and the pharmaceutical manufacturers who are partnering in this important initiative.

"We are currently in discussions with Pharmaceutical companies about getting on board to support this program and to 'own' a disease category," says Bolling.

"The rollout of our initiative, is focused on African-Americans because they are at inordinately high risk of cardiovascular disorders (hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes), as well as respiratory disease."

Pulpit and Physician Together

Key to the plan is involving the church community and African American physicians. "The church community is extremely influential among African Americans as the gatekeeper for the soul and health," says HNN Managing Partner, David D. Comey. "But what makes this program unlike any other is that we will be right there in the churches and communities, not just with information, but with specially trained staff who will screen and test church members and provide on-the-spot referrals or appointments for follow-up treatment. In areas where facilities permit, patient exams can be conducted right there and then by qualified African American physicians."

Program Components

There are three aspects of the initiative that make it a unique disease awareness program:

1. **Target** – identify very specific Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) so that the program reaches the highest density of the specific population desired (eg, 55 year-old Hispanic with a propensity for diabetes). Roska Healthcare provides the expertise, tools, and appropriate messages needed for targeting.
2. **Engage** – look at the influential elements in the community. In the African-American community, for example, the most influential people are clergy and physicians. Healthy National Network provides access to these professionals.

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3. **Show/Participate** – create an event, something that is going to be a catalyst to action so that the program does not just talk to people about health risks, but actually shows them the risks and provides a path to take action. Impact Health runs the local screening events, providing “feet on the street” (ie, nurses and staff).

Keeping Physicians in the Flock

HNN's Physician Advisory Board coordinates with local chapters of the National Medical Association, which is the voice of the African American medical community and represents the interests of more than 25,000 physicians, many of whom are intimately involved as leading members and Ministers in the Baptist church and other faith-based organizations. The participating physicians are thus well positioned to encourage congregations to proactively engage in the program's objectives and health-related events through a church and community-centered program.

“The challenge,” says Bolling, “is how to reach this specific community, be able to use key opinion leaders from the NMA, educate those physicians about the risks and provide them with tools to interact with patients.”

Focus on Women as Keepers of Health

The “keepers of health” in the African American as well as other communities are the women who need to be reached through a very credible channel, which in this case is the church. Health screening events, organized and run by Impact Health, help the congregation members connect the dots. The message goes to the right people who then have access to healthcare professionals who can define their risks and provide them with treatment options. The goal is to close the gaps where people don't seek treatment and don't get diagnosed.

“What we do in association with Impact health,” says Comey, “is to take advantage of a ‘teachable moment’ during a screening event in which a high-risk African-American male may have just found out he may have type II diabetes. It is at that moment that we can effectively communicate what this means, how it will impact his life, and most importantly what he has to do to begin to take control. The testing itself is done in a church hall or a community center that may be involved with churches.”

Customization

Part of this is customizing the program for specific communities. Detroit is different from Atlanta, etc. “Before we do any targeted messaging,” says Comey, “we meet with local physicians who can hear and interact with a key opinion leader in the African-American medical community. We then meet with a select group of physicians afterward and talk about the issues specific to that community and then customize the delivery of messages and screening events for that community.”

Mega Church Cascade Effect

According to Roska's Bolling, the Multi-cultural Outreach Initiative communication strategy is one that will create a cascade effect to enable carefully targeted messages to reach vast audiences. “For example,” he said, “in each target market, the Initiative will identify and work with a ‘Mega Church’ and smaller satellite churches that the Mega Church helps to identify. Typically, these Mega Churches have approximately 2,000 or more worshippers at a weekly service and an in-place Health Ministry that will be engaged to reinforce the program's messages and to stimulate appropriate members of the congregation to take action.”

By engaging the churches, messages are delivered to the congregations:

- Directly from the pulpit
- Through ads and announcements in church newsletters
- With posters on-site at the church
- Through handout materials
- By engaging the Health Ministry

Bolling said this church-centered outreach also will be reinforced through community-centered communications including:

- Radio
- Outdoor (billboards)
- Transit (buses, bus shelters)
- Direct mail
- Interactive
- Television
- Retail promotion

In addition, the partnership between HNN, Roska Healthcare Advertising and Impact Health will support the program by creating a fully turn-key

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initiative that leverages five core elements to ensure success including:

1. Audience Targeting
2. Thought Leader Influence
3. Credible Messaging
4. Community Outreach
5. Health Screening Events

“These collective efforts will have a dramatic impact on educating African Americans of their risk for serious diseases, and provide the motivation to take action,” Comey added. “The consequent involvement of their physicians will also impact prescribing behavior due to the increase of doctor visits, diagnoses and treatments that can lead to improved health for countless individuals.”

“The model has been developed,” says Bolling. “We have coordinated with faith-based organizations and the local chapters of the National Medical Association and we have identified key markets. The last piece is the sponsorship. We are currently well into talks on this initiative with several major pharmaceutical companies eager to reach multi-cultural communities in need of disease awareness, screening, and care.”

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Podcast Follow-up Interview with Jay Bolling & David Comey

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For more information, please visit www.talk.pharma-mkting.com

Organizations Participating in the Multi-cultural Outreach Initiative

Healthy National Network (HNN) provides risk stratification, clinical screenings, disease-specific health educational materials and tools, health risk assessments, and the opportunity to have every HNN congregation member enroll into a personalized, targeted intervention program. For the last five years, HNN has been working with Episcopal, Lutheran, and Baptist Churches in order to complete the loop between them and pharmaceutical manufacturers to reach out to specific congregations within these denominations representing about seven million people.

Roska Healthcare Advertising is a recognized leader in targeted Rx marketing. Over the past 17 years, working with more than 55 brands in 25+ therapeutic categories, the agency has pioneered its unique fusion of disease awareness, brand advertising and direct marketing to create a fully integrated approach for communicating with consumers and healthcare professionals.

Impact Health is the nation's leading health promotion and biometric testing organization with 20 years of experience servicing various types of clients including pharmaceutical companies, employers, managed care organizations, agencies and other health promotion firms. Impact Health provides an integrated suite of onsite risk assessments, screening services, disease awareness programs, personalized counseling and self-care testing products.