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THE DIGITAL FUTURE OF PHYSICIAN MARKETING

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Increasingly, physicians are finding value in interacting with other physicians via social platforms, including physician-only online communities like Doximity, QuantiaMD, Sermo, and Medscape Physician Connect. And, as more physicians gravitate toward digital platforms, healthcare marketers, communicators, and strategists are taking advantage of the opportunity to strengthen their physician marketing efforts through digital approaches.

STEP ONE: Adoption of Digital Communication Tools

Many healthcare marketers have already integrated digital communication tools into the overall physician marketing program. For instance:

The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX, was an early adopter when it launched its physicianrelations.org portal for referring physicians. Next it added a Twitter feed specifically targeting community physicians, a Paper.li daily electronic newspaper that aggregated MD Anderson Faculty Tweets, and a Facebook page with oncology resources for healthcare professionals.

Tufts Medical Center, Boston, MA, has introduced its TuftsMedicalCenter.tv website—a video repository and resource center for referring physicians and consumers. On the site, specialists and subspecialists discuss specific health conditions, medical procedures, and therapies. For the busy community physician, the videos are easily accessible and a convenient resource when considering a potential patient referral.

Tufts Medical Center and **Floating Hospital for Children** have launched a referring physician microsite designed to simplify the referral process for physicians and allow for a better patient experience. The physician microsite gives referring physicians up-to-date quality information, contact information for the physician liaison team, and access to a number of helpful documents that can be downloaded as PDFs. These documents include a quality brochure, patient brochures, talking points for physicians making a referral, directions to the medical center, and profiles of specialists.

Signature Healthcare in southeastern Massachusetts, about 20 miles south of Boston, has also launched a digital platform for reaching referring physicians. The microsite (SignatureMDExcellence.com) is part of a broader physician marketing program and has proven to be a valuable tool for physician retention and



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recruitment — two important considerations in the highly competitive eastern Massachusetts healthcare environment. Online videos of Signature Healthcare’s employed physicians are showcased on the microsite and leveraged across a number of digital platforms, including YouTube, Facebook, Google+, and Pinterest.

Cooper University Health Care, Camden, NJ, successfully integrated digital tools into its physician relations program when it created the South Jersey Medical Report. The Report is a full physician marketing program targeting employed and community physicians. Elements of the program include a physician microsite rich with video content featuring Cooper specialists, a dedicated physician Twitter feed, a traditional physician newsletter available as a paper document and electronically, and a mobile application.

STEP TWO: Defining Digital Roles within Physician Relations

As digital tools are integrated into physician marketing programs, a key challenge is emerging for the physician relations department. Specifically, how will the availability of, and the need to distribute, large quantities of digital content impact the structure and function of the physician relations team and, in particular, the physician liaison?

The Digital Content Marketer

In order to handle the growing volume of content and the addition of new digital channels, roles within the physician relations department may need to evolve or change. One new position that seems likely to develop is that of the digital physician relations content marketer: a point person within the department responsible for aggregating digital content and disseminating it across numerous digital channels.

Content would be aggregated on a primary platform developed specifically to meet the needs of community physicians—such as a microsite, the “For Medical Professionals” section of the organization’s website, a LinkedIn Group, or a blog. By continually updating the content, the information would be attractive to search engines and improve rankings.

The digital content marketer could also manage the department’s daily digital outreach to physicians and practices. This would involve using electronic marketing and social media (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and other platforms) to post links to specific pieces of content that

referring physicians may value. The digital content marketer would also monitor social channels and respond to retweets and questions from followers. Active listening would be an important part of this job, noting and then responding to requests from physicians and practice managers.

The Digital Physician Relations Specialist

The physician liaison’s role is likely to evolve to accommodate new digital efforts as well. Although many physicians are comfortable with digital communication tools, many are not. So there is a significant opportunity to educate community physicians, clinicians, and employees of physician practices about ways to access information about the medical center via digital channels. An important part of the liaison’s role moving forward will likely involve using practice visits to familiarize practice team members with the digital platforms being used by the healthcare organization and acquainting them with the range of information available.

Physician liaisons could also potentially become digital physician relations specialists. By adding digital communication to their roles, liaisons could significantly expand their reach. Today, liaisons are limited in the number of practices they can visit in a day. But with the help of social media, they can freely disseminate information about their organizations and reach out to practices far and wide, no longer encumbered by the obstacles of geography and time.

For the digital physician relations specialist, in addition to the traditional functions of a liaison, a portion of each day would be spent using social media. The digital specialist would post content linking back to the organization’s website, blog, microsite, or other digital hub; retweet information shared by “faculty tweeters”; and direct community physicians to the organization’s online resources for referring physicians.

Is It Time for Digital Physician Relations?

There’s no doubt that digital physician relations is relevant for today’s healthcare organizations. The question is, Will your organization embrace it now and get ahead of the curve, or play catch-up on the back end?

It is within the digital space, as a new feature of the physician relations program, that the hearts and minds of the new “digital doctors” may be won or lost. Effective communication requires that information be delivered in a manner that fits within the context of the end-user’s professional life. As physicians’ appetite for digital information grows, so, too, must digital marketing, communication, and outreach efforts.