

## Pr For Physicians

Perhaps the most difficult concept for a physician to grasp is the role of Public Relations in building a successful practice/business. The common perception has been that P.R. was anathema. And that belief was not unique to the health profession. Not long ago, bankers, attorneys and others were taught that all forms of advertising, marketing and promotion were wrong. It was a moral issue. Being good at what one does was enough. Calling attention to it was unseemly.

In the health care world, apart from being perceived as vulgar, marketing was considered unnecessary. It was assumed that patients would automatically and miraculously come forever. As a result, physicians erroneously believed they were sheltered from the demands placed on other businesses.

Health professionals also have a tendency to view marketing as hawking - much like a barker at a carnival or a crass used-car salesman trying to lure unsuspecting victims. It's the thought of the coarse, smoke-and-mirror, hit-them-over-the-head style of publicity that understandably terrifies many in the medical field.

It is, therefore, difficult for physicians to view public relations as an integral part of a successful practice. But just as the image of a physician giving a patient a stiff drink and a bullet to bite before performing surgery is archaic, those P.R. stereotypes have nothing to do with the reality of an intelligent, effective media campaign that educates and informs the media and the public. Used effectively, P.R. can usher in new concepts and perspectives, and shape the ideas of a community and a nation. Our PR firm has represented hospitals, medical centers and individual physicians. We have placed medical-oriented stories in a wide range of media outlets including Time magazine, USA Today, CNN, the Today Show, the Wall Street Journal, NPR and several other media outlets. The media we have placed has ranged from breakthroughs in cancer therapy, to new orthopedic surgeries, to the latest in plastic surgery. These stories help our clients reach their target markets and position them as experts in their field, but they also educate the public.

To reach that end, physicians need to view themselves as educators. After all, we live in the information age and no profession, field or practice can avoid its effects. Professionals who understand the process and actively take control of the information are the ones who will succeed. Today, savvy hospitals and physicians view public relations as an integral component of their business strategy. They are learning that they must change their perceptions to remain competitive. But few have really come to terms with the process. It's not enough to simply hire a professional and continue as before; a change in attitude and outlook is required.

For example, when it comes to communicating, doctors are used to presenting scientific data to their peers. They are trained to think in terms of studies and statistics, whereas the public and media both understand and respond more favorably to anecdotal stories.

Of course, this does not apply only to those in the health care field. Many professionals can speak the jargon of their particular field, but this makes for a very insular form of communication. This is why media training can be integral to an effective PR campaign. All business professionals can benefit from learning to speak the public's language and honing their ability to communicate.

Is the fact that medicine must come of age as a business necessarily a bad thing? Considering the fact that information control and distribution is the new currency, learning to effectively manage one's image and message will soon be viewed as Business 101. Even for physicians.