



*Powerful Healthcare Marketing Communications Solutions*

## **Guideline Development: 6 Tips For Increasing The Odds They Will Be Seen – And Used**

For anyone in the business of developing medical guidelines, it is a familiar story. You expend tremendous resources to produce high-quality, evidence-based recommendations and announce their availability. Months or years later, you learn that the guidelines have had little impact on medical practice. Unfortunately, experts have been slow to embrace them. Worse yet, many healthcare providers do not know they exist.

Non-adherence to medical guidelines can have a negative impact on treatment outcomes. For example, a study published in the May 2005 edition of the *European Heart Journal* indicates that heart failure patients treated according to established European guidelines do better than those who are not. However, researchers found that 40 percent of heart failure patients did not receive ACE inhibitors, beta-blockers or spironolactone – three medications that have been shown to provide the most benefit.

Unfortunately, guideline developers have little hope of successfully addressing all of the barriers to recommendation adoption.

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Two of the most significant are economics and time constraints. Another major obstacle is tradition. Many practitioners tend to stick with treatment practices they are comfortable with.

In contrast, much can be done to overcome another common barrier to guideline uptake: lack of awareness that they exist. Increasing the visibility and impact of guidelines requires understanding the guidelines' target audience, developing solid partnerships and leveraging non-traditional communications channels. Following are six tips for increasing the odds that your guidelines will be seen – and used.

### **Tip #1: Conduct Research On The Target Audience**

Conducting research on the target audience of the guidelines is critical. This research will reveal important information about how they consume information and the types of guidelines they have previously adopted.

For example, your research may reveal that healthcare practitioners respond best to guidelines that are consistent with those produced by major managed care organizations. These findings may prompt you to incorporate relevant managed care guidelines into those you are developing.

## 6 Tips For Maximizing Guideline Visibility & Uptake

Tip # 1: Conduct Research

Why?: To Find Out What's Worked

Tip #2: Establish Partnerships

Why?: To Extend Your Reach

Tip#3: Make Them Easy To Use

Why?: Complexity = Poor Uptake

Tip #4: Leverage Technology

Why?: Technology Can Aid Education

Tip #5: Leverage Word-of-Mouth Channels

Why?: If It's Not Being Talked About, People Don't Know About It

Tip #6: Remember The Rule Of 3

Why?: People Have To See It At Least 3 Times To Remember It

Conducting research needn't be an expensive proposition. Consider asking constituents to fill out a brief on-line survey relating their perceptions and experiences with guidelines. You can also conduct inexpensive research at your annual meeting or other major conference.

Incorporating your research findings into the guideline development process may increase the odds that people will be receptive to the recommendations once they are released.

### **Tip #2: Establish Partnerships**

Anyone considering developing guidelines should seek to establish partnerships with related organizations. Most importantly, there is strength in numbers. In addition, healthcare practitioners may be more willing to pay attention to guidelines endorsed by more than one organization. Finally, you may be able to secure approval to distribute guideline-related information to the partner organization's membership. This will increase the odds that the guidelines will be seen.

### **Tip #3: Make Them Easy To Use**

Healthcare practitioners are often under significant time constraints and do not have time to read lengthy guidelines. While it is important to publish the guidelines in a major medical publication, healthcare practitioners should not be forced to refer to it to learn about the recommendations. Instead, consider making them available in an easy-to-use format, such as:

**Executive Summary:** Publish the key parts of the guidelines in a two or three page executive summary and distribute it widely.

**Cards:** Produce attractively designed cards featuring a treatment algorithm that practitioners can pocket and refer to on an as-needed basis.

**PDA Program:** Personal digital assistants or PDAs are ubiquitous. Consider developing a software application that enables healthcare professionals to quickly access key parts of the guidelines in real-time.

#### **Tip #4: Take Advantage Of Technology**

Guidelines needn't be bound to paper. Consider developing an on-line version of the guidelines for distribution via your Web site or on CD ROM. Or, put together a Webcast featuring experts talking about the guidelines and make it available for download. Making the guidelines accessible via widely available technologies will help people learn about them.

#### **Tip #5: Leverage Word-of-Mouth Communications Channels**

To attract attention to the guidelines, you need to get people talking about them. Following are some ways to start a "buzz" about your recommendations.

**Seek Controversy:** Guidelines are usually developed to correct inefficient treatment practices. Consider highlighting controversial aspects of the recommendations. This will spark conversation and debate about them, which may increase people's interest in them.

**Embrace Blogs:** Blogs or Web logs are becoming an increasingly popular means of communicating new information. Conduct some research on the most influential blogs in your area. (If none exist, consider starting one.) Distribute information about the guidelines to blog authors and volunteer to provide commentary. This is a great way to spread word of the guidelines to a wider audience.

### **Tip #6: Remember The Rule Of 3**

One of the cardinal rules of communication is the Rule of Three: Reach your target audience **three** times through **three** different communications channels. If a person repeatedly sees a message, they are more likely to remember it. Use all of the communications resources available to you to ensure that people hear about the guidelines as often as possible.

Ensuring that healthcare practitioners are aware of and act on the guidelines you develop is a difficult task. However, being inventive and communicating widely about them may increase the odds they are seen – and used.

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