

How Healthcare Communication and Marketing Improves Health Outcomes

Healthcare communication and marketing rests on the mission of helping engage and inform people so that they can better comprehend how medications, devices and healthy behaviors can positively change or save lives. Effective healthcare communication and marketing helps to raise consumer awareness, improve healthcare literacy, foster treatment plan adherence, and remove stigma of uncomfortable or embarrassing conditions to reduce underdiagnosis and undertreatment.

Healthcare communication and marketing that includes direct-to-consumer (DTC), point-of-care (POC) and medical professional marketing requires a true, deep understanding of the patient and practitioner audiences to help craft messaging that successfully inform, educate and motivate patients and clinicians to take action. It fosters consumer engagement, dialogue and joint decision-making with their medical professionals to bolster treatment compliance and adherence, leading to greater successful health outcomes.

1) **Informs, educates and empowers patients**

Consumers benefit from having access to multiple information sources about drugs and other treatment options rather than relying solely on a medical professional that they may or may not regularly visit.^{1 2 3} Healthcare marketing enhances patient perceptions about conditions that could be medically treatable and encourages dialogue with clinicians.^{4 5} The availability of this information will become even more essential with the recent and announced Department of Health and Human Services reductions in force, including entire teams focused on informing the public about drug developments, drug safety issues, and drug approvals.⁶

2) **Encourages patients to seek medical appointments and continue to see their doctor**

Numerous studies cite that healthcare marketing prompts patients to consult a health care provider, seek medical advice and promote dialogue about lifestyle changes that improve patients' health, whether or not a drug is prescribed.^{7 8 9} An analysis of Neilson and claims data from 40 large national employers showed that exposure to drug advertising lead to an increase in the number of office visits each year that typically continued with additional follow-up visits for multiple years.¹⁰

3) **Removes stigma associated with humiliating conditions and diseases**

Consumer awareness campaigns for health problems that are embarrassing to patients have reduced the stigma associated with multiple conditions, including depression and anxiety, erectile dysfunction, osteoporosis, enlarged prostate, high cholesterol, HIV, psoriasis/eczema, obesity, and diabetes, as well as encouraging early screenings and treatment for breast, skin and prostate cancers.^{11 12}

4) **Improves healthcare literacy**

DTC advertising plays an important role in enhancing overall healthcare literacy among the public. By providing information about medical conditions, treatment options, and the mechanisms of action of various drugs, advertisements help demystify complex medical concepts. This improved understanding empowers patients to make informed decisions about their health and fosters a sense of ownership and control over their treatment plans.^{13 14}

5) **Promotes patient dialogue with health care providers**

Most medical professionals agree that consumer drug ads promote dialogue with patients, along with heightened awareness and detection of adverse reactions.^{15 16} An FDA survey, found that 73% believed that these ads helped patients ask more thoughtful questions and prompted 27% to make an appointment with their doctor to talk about a condition they had not previously discussed.¹⁷

6) **Little or no impact on average drug prices by eliminating DTC drug ads**

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) examined policies that would eliminate direct-to-consumer prescription drug advertising or prohibit it for three years after a drug's initial approval for sale, concluding that the result would be a very small reduction (0.1% to 1.0%) in average drug prices.¹⁸

7) Increases detection of unrelated diseases

Prescription drug ads have been credited with decreasing the under-diagnosis and undertreatment of medical conditions.¹⁹ A Harvard/MGH/Harris Interactive study also found that 25% of patients who visited their doctor after seeing a prescription drug ad received a new diagnosis; of these, 43% were considered to have a high-priority health condition.²⁰

8) Encourages patient compliance and adherence

The data consistently show that healthcare marketing improves compliance with a doctor-directed prescription and heightens a patient's perceived commitment or adherence to follow treatment instructions.^{21 22 23} In a study by Harvard/MGH and Harris Interactive, 46% of physicians said that they felt healthcare marketing increased patient compliance.²⁴

9) Reduces under diagnosis and under treatment

Prescription drug ads have been credited with decreasing the under-diagnosis and undertreatment of medical conditions.²⁵ The 2003 Harvard University/Massachusetts General Hospital/Harris Interactive study also found that 25% of patients who visited their doctor after seeing Rx ads received a new diagnosis; of these, 43% were considered to have a high-priority health condition.²⁶

10) Less expensive generic prescriptions are still prescribed despite branded promotions

Despite concerns that direct-to-consumer ads would push patients toward more expensive branded medications, studies have found the increased number of office visits due to direct-to-consumer ads usually resulted in a prescription for a generic drug or a non-drug treatment.²⁷

11) Disclosing price does not appear to impact individuals' view of the advertised drug

In a study comparing the prescription drug ads that provided information about the cost of the drug with other advertisements that did not, no significant differences were found in the effect of the ad among viewers with publicly available information about price. Price disclosures in advertisements will have little effect on consumer behavior.²⁸

12) Strengthens a patient's relationship with a clinician

Studies generally agree that participation of an informed patient in clinical decision-making benefits the patient-clinician relationship.²⁹ Research indicates that print healthcare marketing reinforced the patient-clinician relationship: 83% of the ads focused on physician-patient communication, 76% explicitly promoted dialogue with health care providers, and 54% clearly placed the doctor in control.³⁰

13) Adds consumer choice and competitive offerings

Banning advertising, in fact, reduces knowledge to US citizens on choices related to their health care. Choices in the marketplace increases patient awareness and self-advocacy which will benefit people and help them have a say in their care.³¹ If consumers have less knowledge of what is available, there is less incentive for manufacturers to develop offerings, such as patient support programs or increasing affordability and accessible to all patients.³²

14) Provides patients with access and affordability solutions

Prescription drug marketing and advertising include product-specific information related to patient affordability and savings programs. As patients pay an increasing amount of the total costs for medicines, it is critical that they have information on savings programs and scenarios based on their insurance type (including no insurance). This also includes information on options outside of traditional insurance, such as direct-to-consumer programs, GoodRx, and Mark Cuban's Drugs Cost Plus. A 2024 study from KFF found 21% of adults indicate they have not filled a prescription because of the cost, with another 21% resorting to over-the-counter medications instead.³³ Healthcare communication and marketing efforts provide information that helps patients start and stay on their needed medications.³⁴

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