Marketing Family Medicine and Our Clinics:
I’m Lovin’ It…Just Do It… It Gives You Wiiiings!

Dr. Payne suggested in last quarter’s Practice Management committee article that practice managers “ride switch”, or try new things to keep their practice interesting and dynamic. Marketing is a very interesting business concept that has great potential for interesting and dynamic application for practices. Management professionals recognize the enormous benefit of marketing on their business. Wikipedia defines marketing as “the process of communicating the value of a product or service to customers.” Marketing may well be the spark that transforms our practices and our specialty. Family Medicine needs effective marketing right now.

Marketing in military medicine is obviously not intended to increase financial profits, but consider other profits that might increase with marketing: the shares of patient enrollment, patient satisfaction and loyalty (especially to family medicine), front line employee satisfaction and productivity, retention and recruitment of family physicians and staff loyal to family medicine. Perhaps medicine, particularly military medicine, has shied away from traditional business models because “medicine is not a business.” Medicine may not be a business like Apple or Nike, but those of you in practice management roles recognize that business management principles are alive and well in our practices, especially when it comes to people. And that’s who marketing is all about: people. Entire courses are dedicated to marketing principles. Three are presented here with immediate applications that may or may not be feasible in your practice. Take these brainstorming seeds, plant them, and see what grows in your specific environment.
“I’m lovin’ it”: Branding

This key concept to marketing theory was adopted from cattle owners in an effort to differentiate their animals from another rancher’s cattle. The marketing application is obvious: the symbol, design, or name that differentiates one product from another. You will think quickly of logos of your favorite consumer products. You may then think of the logo of your Service, your Medical Command, your Hospital…how about your Clinic? Consider the impact of an identifying, unifying symbol on your patients and your front line employees. T-shirts, website, front desk, business cards, letterhead…within financial reason, of course. It might not have any impact, or it might build confidence and loyalty among your patients, potential patients, and employees.

The evolution of the Family Medicine identity seems to be centering on the brand of the “Personal Physician”. Decide with your medical staff if this is how the family physicians and providers in your clinic will be branded. Perhaps your practice will have a slightly different brand: “My Health Coach”, “My Doc”, or “My Medical Home”. By having the discussion, you may help lead your family physicians and providers to a values based vision for the practice: does the clinic provide full spectrum care, holistic wellness, patient centered care, soldier centered care, or all of the above. Create a brand and inspiration may follow.

“Just Do it”: Customer Service and Satisfaction

Alarm bells going off again? “Patients are not customers?” Again, business theory helps us with this. Specifically, take a look at the following diagram from the Harvard Business Review. Heskett etal describes the diagram in the article: “here’s how the chain works: enhancing internal service quality (equipping employees with the skills and power to serve customers) raises employee satisfaction, which fuels employee loyalty and productivity, which boost external service value-which then increases customer satisfaction and loyalty.”

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Again, do not emphasize revenue or profits in this model; rather consider the progression of concepts. Internal service quality and employee satisfaction will drive customer satisfaction. The current furlough has not been satisfying to many employees, especially those on the front lines of our clinics. How can we best market the furlough to our employees? New programs and process improvements, including the Patient Centered Medical Home change the way employees do business, or the internal service quality. Consistent with most change management theory, this model confirms that progressive changes should be marketed to the employees as well as patients.

Consider creative communication strategies to reach your employees other than email. Record a monthly video update and post to a shared site with a creative title like “The Monthly Show”. Schedule lunch walks with your front line employees, especially the Medical Support Assistants, Nursing Assistants, and Enlisted administrative support. Consider a “personalized” welcome letter or secured email to new patients as a method of establishing lines of communication. Invite new patients to a “meet and greet” with the providers, clinic staff, and clinic leadership. It could be held on a semi-annual interval, located in the clinic or other centralized place.
“It Gives You Wiiiings!”: Challenge (and change) Your Mental Models

This MIT Sloan Management review article calls the business world to ideals that our clinics and specialty could seek to achieve, as well: “we need to rethink our mental models to embrace the evolving segment of empowered consumers with new ways of understanding their behavior, capturing the data on their behavior, analyzing it, and designing strategies to affect their behavior in a way that is consistent with the company’s objectives.” Creativity and innovation are required in the marketing of Family Medicine clinics, the PCMH, and the specialty of Family Medicine to the Military Health System. This is the fun part, but does require diligent knowledge of all the links in your clinic’s service profit chain.

The article suggested an interesting application called “reverse mentoring”. Experienced managers would seek the understanding of “younger” mentors in order to learn about new markets and technologies. Young medics have consistently been a wealth of ideas and energy for practice managers. Seek the feedback of a variety of generations and perspectives from among your employees and your patients.

Best Practices

Whether you knew what you were doing or not, perhaps you have already applied many of these marketing principles and ideas to your practice. Maybe you have ideas for how to market specific aspects of Family Medicine clinics, the PCMH, or Family Medicine as a specialty? Would you email those best marketing ideas and practices to the Practice Management Committee? We’d love to collect them and post them to our new area on the USAFP website: elizabeth.duque@us.army.mil and amanda.cuda@us.army.mil.

Can you match the brands and the slogans?

I’m Lovin’ It.                   Redbull
Just Do It.       McDonalds
It Gives You Wiiiings!    Nike
References
