

MEDICAL NEWS

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Saving face; moving forward

Turning PR—good or bad—into a positive brand identity.

By Erin Brereton

Earlier this year, the debate over the Affordable Care Act brought national attention to the healthcare industry.

Thanks to two highly publicized local coverage issues, health insurance also received a considerable amount of media coverage in Kentucky.

An ongoing contract negotiation between Humana and more than 460 University of Louisville physicians prompted the doctors to leave the Humana network as of July 1, 2010, to avoid agreeing to lesser reimbursements, the Louisville *Courier-Journal* recently reported.

Until an agreement is reached, some patients are caught in the crossfire, being

forced to decide whether to sidestep seeking care, switch to a Humana-approved physician—or pay often hefty out-of-network fees to see their current doctor.

Citing the current negotiations, Humana declined to be interviewed for this article.

Norton Healthcare and Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield also negotiated over terms for several months before beginning a new three-year contract in fall 2009.

According to a joint press release issued by the two organizations, the contract restored in-network access to Norton facilities with low out-of-pocket expenses.

However, for more than three months, a quarter million residents were without complete insurance benefits, according to the *Courier-Journal*.

The Importance of Identity

During contract issue periods, patients who need or want to visit specific doctors are at risk of having to pay more or find a new doctor. According to Tony Felts, Anthem communications director, cost tends to rank high on the list of patient priorities.

“What we’ve learned in previous experiences is that affordability is still the No. 1 concern with businesses in the community and consumers,” he said. “That rises to the top.”

When negotiations slow—or stop altogether—concerns over cost and continuing to receive the preferred type of coverage can cause alarm in the community.

Although healthcare insurance and care

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Enhance & Improve

Innovation can come from anywhere. Within the healthcare industry, especially, innovation is engrained in our thinking, our culture, and the way we do business. Here are some healthcare innovations that not only impact our industry but also enhance the care, treatment and minds of our patients.

Read more in Innovation on page 15

Celebrating daVinci Si

After Jerry Stephens complained of a persistent sore throat and earache, he went to get a second opinion. That second opinion was a potential life saver. Stephens was referred to the specialists at the James Graham Brown Cancer Center at UofL Health Care. The cancer was caught early, and Stephens became the first patient in Kentucky to benefit from an innovative surgery using the daVinci Si robotic surgery system.

Read more in Innovation on page 18

Building your brand

In the day-to-day pressure cooker of a modern medical practice, it’s easy to put marketing on the back burner.

Read more in Commentary on page 24

Special Section: Health Law Series

This second installment provides an overview of the goals, duration, payment and eligibility features of noteworthy programs and projects, as provided under the Affordable Care Act. This additional information should help hospitals identify programs and projects that might benefit them. In the forthcoming third and final installment, we will focus our attention on select programs and projects of most interest to hospitals and will give an update on their implementation.

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Serving Kentucky and Southern Indiana

Saving face; moving forward

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providers may find themselves in the news due to negotiations, many shy away from using media attention to build their public image as a brand, said Gil Bashe, executive vice president of the health practice at public relations/branding consultancies company Makovsky + Co., based in New York.



“Brand building is very important for the healthcare industry, which has, in some cases, been resistant to do that because they thought they had no chance to win,” Bashe said. “[Insurers] thought they were never going to look good because they’re the people who say no.”

However, public image is important for healthcare industry members to consider.

“Ultimately, branding is shorthand for content, trust and transparency,” said Bashe. “Insurance companies have to use [even difficult] situations to establish trust and transparency.”

Hiring an external PR agency during a predicament period may help.

“They have different perspectives that they can bring on different issues,” said Jon Mills, a spokesman at WellPoint, which Mills describes as a parent company for Anthem.

Bashe suggests hiring a vendor that specializes in communication.

“It’s often important to take an outside look at your brand’s reputation,” he said. “They can augment your creativity and objectively assess what’s going on.”

Input—And Output

However, while transparency can generally help build trust with patients, in some cases, sharing all the ongoing discussion details may not make sense.

“A lot of these things never make it into the public because they go down to the 11th hour, and both sides are pretty sure there’s going to be some sort of resolution,” said Mike Lorch, vice president of health services for Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in Kentucky. “You don’t want to stir up the public 30 days ahead of time when you have a good sense things are going to be resolved.”

Yet if community concern is already an issue, communication can help calm fears, Lorch said.

During its negotiations, Anthem sent out print mailing pieces and set up a nonpassword protected, public web site to keep members informed.

“We were able to update information immediately and respond to any questions,” Lorch said. “We also met face-to-face with larger groups to hear about some of the issues they encountered with their employees.”

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Building a Brand By Being A Resource

Keeping in touch with members during negotiation talks can help calm community fears—but true brand building goes beyond crisis control.

To establish an ongoing sense of loyalty and trust, some providers have made structural changes and begun to offer extra assistance to members.

“Everything you do to support [the company’s mission and customers] through outreach efforts reinforces and helps to really build your brand and reputation,” Mills said.

For example, to encourage members to lead a healthy lifestyle, Anthem offers outreach services, which the company promotes in part through social networking channels like Facebook. Its programs include a 24-hour nurse hotline, newborn parent resources and online health assessments.

“We serve more than 33 million people through our affiliate plans,” Mills said. “It’s become more important, especially as consumers become more involved and more active in their healthcare and healthcare decisions.”

Such programs are a win-win situation for both the insurer and insured, Felts said.

“We [want to] have a positive impact on the health of individuals and those close to them,” Mills said. “And hopefully, in doing so, we can improve their health and bring down costs.”

Anthem also has increased use of its online price estimate tool, which gives members an actual projected cost for procedures.

“If you go into the member tool put in your location, then say you’re having one of the procedures on list — they are 52 [elective ones] listed — it will come back to you and show you the actual cost that it is going to be; the total cost shared by the health plan and member at each facility,” Lorch said.

If, for example, you’re having a colonoscopy, the tool will show you the contracted rate for colonoscopies at each of the area network hospitals, along with an average of the associated professional charges.

Anthem has begun encouraging employer groups and primary care physicians to use the tool in recent months—which Lorch said can help increase the quality of coverage and decrease policy-related costs.

Policy holders can better estimate the often significant out-of-pocket costs; primary care physicians can have a better understanding of what the cost difference between different facilities in the area is to help them make the most cost-effective referrals to specialists.

Employers also benefit.

“It’s important to employers to be able to provide good coverage and keep costs as low as possible, so they’re looking for direction



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to the lower cost alternative,” Lorch said.

Healthcare insurance providers can also offer better—and more popular—coverage by eliminating some of the red tape typically involved with claims, Bashe said.

“Let doctors determine what patients need in terms of referrals and diagnostics,” he said.

According to Bashe, empowering doctors to make more decisions can help reduce administrative costs—and increase care quality.

“The patient doesn’t have to go back to the insurance company and say, ‘My doctor said I need this MRI; can I get approval, please?’” he said.

Making Your Mark

Like unexpected illness, contract negotiations are sometimes unavoidable. However, the way an insurance company and healthcare provider handle the situation can greatly affect both entities’ public image.

Keeping transparent about negotiation concerns and news can have a big impact on the community’s perception of the healthcare industry; outside assistance may also help.

Although negotiation-related media scrutiny may feel negative, Bashe urges healthcare providers and insurance companies to remember one important thing: It’s still publicity.

“A crisis is an opportunity,” Bashe said. “You have a lot of attention being placed on you. Using that for something positive is a opportunity to win new hearts and minds — you can keep the customers you have and earn the admiration of the public.

“[You want them to] say, ‘That’s the way to handle something uncomfortable.’”

Flaget Memorial Hospital unveils full-service cancer center

By **Melanie Wolkoff Wachsman**

Flaget Memorial Hospital, Bardstown, Ky., opened the county’s first full-service cancer center this past August. Louisville, Ky.-based Architection handled design and building of the new center.

“The new treatment center is designed as a state-of-the-art facility in a non-institutional environment that will evoke calmness for patients,” said Paul Torp, Architection president. “To achieve the calming setting, natural colors and materials such as wood paneling and trim have been used throughout. We also included a wall with a waterfall in the front lobby to add to the peaceful atmosphere. The lobby is a curved space that radiates outward from the waterfall wall. The center is designed to give you subtle cues as to where you are in the building. We worked to meld Japanese architecture with Shaker architecture and its simplicity of lines and detailing.”

Torp said that Architection has completed more than 160 cancer centers around the nation and consider Flaget to be one of their “showcase facilities.”

Flaget vice president of outpatient services Rick VanCise said that Architection has created a design with patient comfort and staff efficiency in mind. “The best technology is found in a facility that helps patients relax while they get the best treatment available,” VanCise said. “The Flaget Cancer Center is just such a facility. And it will be a tremendous help for patients and

families. Radiation treatment can go on for 30 or 40 days. There’s such a burden to going out of town for the patient, and for the family members. We want to provide the best care locally.”

New Radiation Therapy

Flaget purchased for radiation therapy, the Elekta Synergy machine, a fully digital linear accelerator that allows clinicians to see the tumor at the precise moment of treatment. The accelerator installed at Flaget is the first Elekta in Kentucky equipped with Precise Beam Dynamic technology. This faster treatment delivery will translate into more comfortable treatment sessions for patients.

The radiation portion of the center has walls built four to eight feet thick. This room is also equipped with a large lead door, and is housed in a 2,800 square foot addition to Flaget’s Medical Office Building (MOB). The center includes 4,800 square feet of renovated space in the MOB that will be used for new, private chemotherapy rooms, intravenous therapy treatment for patients with diseases other than cancer, patient education areas, employee work spaces and other amenities. Further, Flaget radiation patients will be able to choose the music they want to hear during treatment. They will also have an unlimited choice of slowly-changing colors that will play across the ceiling, including flickering lights that simulate an open fire.

Flaget Memorial is a member hospital of the Saint Joseph Health System, and also of Catholic Health Initiatives, a national healthcare organization.

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