

Talking to GPs

in a language they will listen to

There is little doubt that everyone involved in providing healthcare and services in the UK would appreciate some clarity and decision-making right now. Yet regardless of the current situation one thing is certain, the word 'national' no longer applies to healthcare and 'local' is clearly where it's at.

There will soon be hundreds of individual mini healthcare systems, all tailored to the needs of their respective local community and to suit their budgets. Each will have its own individual requirements depending on the PCT, the population and how the services are currently commissioned.

Currently, there are 37,000 GP practices in England, of which 220 have formed embryonic consortia, each made up of between two and 89 GP surgeries. Each GP has between 600 and 1000 patients and, on average, there are five GPs per practice. This makes for a very complicated picture that varies by location and surgery.

Every potential healthcare supplier, whether it is for products or services, is focusing firmly on the pathfinders to see how they will commission. Every existing and new supplier wants to ensure they are front of mind when contracts are renewed or subject to



Felicity Knights has for the last six years focused on healthcare, and her clients include: Spire Healthcare, Marie Stopes International, Mental Health Helplines Partnership (mhhp), BMI Healthcare, NHS Mid Essex, Hempsons and Poole Hospital Foundation Trust. At Merchant Healthcare Marketing she leads the PR team and is responsible for devising strategy, media relations, client positioning and campaign development. Before moving into healthcare, Felicity was communications director for LEGO, European communications manager for Electronic Arts and worked for the British Council and Foreign Office, promoting Britain in Europe with global opinion formers and policy makers.

LinkedIn 

<http://www.linkedin.com/pub/felicity-knights/25/434/727>

are the patients to care for.

So how do you differentiate your product? We know from our own research that nothing spreads through the NHS like word-of-mouth recommendation. Therefore good promotion of a successful product or service, whether innovative or not, will prove extremely beneficial.

"So how do you differentiate your product? We know from our own research that nothing spreads through the NHS like word-of-mouth recommendation"

Fundamentally GPs are expected to have all the skills to reduce the level of spend yet many don't. Address this in your communications. Provide a business-led case study, outlining the benefits for GPs, potential financial savings and, most importantly, the outcomes for patients. Ensure that it is relevant to the local population and its needs. We encourage all our clients to think national but execute locally, demonstrating local insight.

Case studies can be promoted via social media as well as by conventional promotional channels and we know that non-obtrusive communications are particularly favoured eg, email marketing, events, editorial and information sourced from LinkedIn.

Finally, we expect to see private consultancies and procurement hubs playing a greater role in managing the buying process from tender through to contract negotiation - so it's worth getting in front of them too.

the author

Felicity Knights

director of communications and PR,
Merchant Healthcare Marketing
