

Health Promotion: Marketing Your Services Effectively

Notes from the online roundtable session held Monday, December 10, 2007 at 2:00 p.m. EST

Below are some of the tried and true suggestions for marketing your health center's services – many of them work even for those with a minimal budget. If you participated, thank you for sharing your suggestions!

- On the first day of school, give brochures to parents of new students and not just the students themselves. Parents are less likely to throw this information away and more likely to read it and keep it handy. When students get sick, the first people they call are often their parents – who will refer them back to your health center. Mailing letters about flu shots to parents also can be very effective!
- Articles in your student newspaper are a great way to get some free publicity. Be an interviewee or featured health writer.
- One school has marketing students on campus come up with campaign ideas to promote the student health center as part of their curriculum. They get credit and you reap the rewards. It's particularly focused as students are marketing to their own demographic.
- Nursing students are another group that can spread the word. Give them some hands-on experience at your health center.
- Become the health or medical expert on your campus. Guest lecture in certain classes and make presentations to student groups, faculty members and even the board of trustees. One school found that buttonholing athletics coaches and other faculty members in the corridor and passing on some relevant health statistics was one way to boost attendance at their health center!
- Form a peer association (PA) group. PA groups can add value to your health center and do a lot of hard work on your behalf to promote your health services. Brenda Dalton has found this a very successful strategy, to the extent that this year, 150 students applied to be members of SHAPE, Spelman College's peer association group.
- Develop a brand. That means a mission and/or vision statement and a motto or tagline that you put on all the marketing materials you have. Students around campus will start to recognize and remember it.
- Work with your PR department wherever possible. In some schools this is less feasible if you have to pay for their time and ideas, but in any case, communicate your department's news and achievements to them. Remember that getting them interested in the first place may be the most challenging part as often they consider themselves there to promote the president and the college as a whole first and foremost. Try to get in the newsletter, whether printed or

electronic.

- Student Health 101 is a service that you might consider if you have the budget for it. You can find their Web site at www.studenthealth101.com
- It is a time-consuming task, but grant writing can help fund health promotion or salary for an extra staff member to carry out health promotion as part of their job description.
- Some schools find that a comments box in the waiting room can provide useful feedback on the image of the health center. This may provide a lot of negative comments – be prepared! However, if you know the impression of the health center that students have at the moment, you may be able to address it and target your promotions accordingly.
- A couple of “don’t”s:
 - Don’t rely just on orientation – students tend to have information overload at this point. Spread your messages out and find other times throughout the year that students are a little more receptive.
 - Don’t rely too heavily on mass e-mails – students tend to receive so many of these that many are unlikely to read them.

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