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California HealthCare Foundation: Groundbreaking New Study Informs and Inspires State-wide Debate

How the results of a complex, groundbreaking study published in *Health Affairs* were leveraged to obtain in-depth, statewide media coverage.

The Company

The California HealthCare Foundation (CHCF) is a non-profit philanthropic organization committed to improving the way healthcare is delivered and financed in California, and helping consumers make informed healthcare and coverage decisions.

Strategic Issues

CHCF entered an agreement to release California data from a study undertaken by the prestigious Dartmouth Atlas Project (DAP), which proved “more healthcare is not necessarily better healthcare.”

For the first time, individual California hospitals were measured on how efficiently they use resources. Among the findings: 1) a greater supply of healthcare services drives increased utilization of those services—without corresponding improvements in medical outcomes; 2) medical outcomes can be worse with the highest levels of healthcare; and 3) a variety of healthcare facilities and providers work against the payer (Medicare) by driving up volume, utilization and cost.

Due to the complexity of the study and its implications, in-depth coverage in the opinion leader media in each major metropolitan region was needed to effectively communicate the information and not sensationalize it. Coverage in smaller California markets was also desired.

Additionally, all audiences (including consumers) needed to be introduced to the counter-intuitive finding that more healthcare does not always produce better results.

Tactical Solutions

The media strategy was to release the results of the study—including data from specific hospitals—exclusively to the major news outlet in each of six regions, in return for the agreement to write a news story that would run the day of the news release. Offering exclusive information and advance access to the study researchers to these media gave reporters the time and incentive to do in-depth stories.

The day of the release, the study results (viewable by region and individual hospital) were posted as an exclusive on the *Health Affairs* website.

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That same day, a telephone press briefing was scheduled to give other media access for interviews. An *Associated Press* reporter participated in this briefing and wrote an article which appeared in numerous smaller papers and also in some of the major papers that had already done their exclusives.

Results

In all cases, the coverage was balanced, clearly communicating the study's key message that "more care is not necessarily better care."

The unusual "regional exclusive" strategy worked well. Initial California media responses included:

- Four of the six major papers offered exclusives ran features on the study; *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Sacramento Bee* and *San Diego Union Tribune*.
- Two radio stations in the Los Angeles metro area aired stories.
- A host of smaller daily and weekly newspapers ran stories.

The *Associated Press* coverage of the study promoted pick-up in local media:

- The AP article was carried by six of the secondary California market papers and numerous smaller papers, as well as by larger publications, including the *San Jose Mercury News*, *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Sacramento Bee*.
- Approximately 50% of the state's mid-tier media ran the AP story.

Two major papers ran Op/Eds highlighting the study results and its implications:

- *Los Angeles Times*
- *Sacramento Bee*

Significantly, coverage of the study was expanded beyond the anticipated California media, including:

- *USA Today*
- *Bloomberg News*

Scott Public Relations...

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For More Information

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Can a regional exclusive media strategy program work for you?

Ask yourself the following questions before considering this approach:

- Do you have complex data that needs to be clearly communicated, without being "sensationalized," to your target audience?
- Can the data be regionalized?
- Do you have credible experts and resources for the data collection, analysis and interpretation?