

## **“CAPTURING YOUR CARDIAC MARKET OPPORTUNITY”**

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With today’s budget cuts and declining reimbursements, can a hospital afford to “niche” market its specialty services? Can a hospital or health system afford not to? A large number of institutions, mainly community based, have not had a history of allocating resources for program-specific marketing activity. The changes in clinical practice, payor requirements and market demands that have occurred over the past five years are causing many health care providers to “re-think” their approach to marketing in high volume areas such as cardiovascular services.

According to a report by the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research (AHCPR), the most common reasons for a hospital admission in the United States are:

1. infant birth (3.8 million/year)
2. coronary atherosclerosis (1.4 million/year)
3. pneumonia (1.2 million/year)
4. heart failure (990,000/year)
5. myocardial infarction (774,000/year)

Of significance, cardiac-related conditions account for three of the five top reasons for hospital admission. Of greater importance, cardiovascular admissions generally account for 20% to 40% of total hospital revenue. This snapshot of today’s health care service needs is expected to continue to change with the aging of the population and the increasing demand for cardiovascular services.

Offering new services and programs such as coronary angioplasty and open heart surgery provide an ideal venue to market to potential patients, but exploring the consumer rationale behind this reveals market drivers beyond “getting the word out”. The need for information on the scope of cardiovascular services available, knowledge of the types of services that the hospital provides very well, patient and physician endorsements, and community outreach all forward an organization’s mission in cardiovascular care.

One of the first questions to be answered when a decision is made to specifically market and brand cardiovascular services: Can the traditional method for identifying the general hospital market be applied to determining the cardiovascular patient market? Hospitals traditionally have looked at service areas and differentiated them into primary, secondary and tertiary based on geography and known referral patterns. A niche strategy requires a different approach.

Identifying a service specific market can be best accomplished using a “market-responsive” methodology. Starting with a map of the region, an area should be outlined based on the knowledge available on the community, referral patterns and feedback from direct patient care representatives in cardiovascular care. Following this exercise, survey cardiologists, key medical staff and the Emergency Department to determine where or

will patients originate to access cardiac care. Once the boundary has been defined with a cardiac perspective, detailed information on hospital discharges in the Cardiovascular Major Diagnostic Codes (MDC-5) can be retrieved and analyzed to identify the Total Cardiac Target Market (TCTM).

The TCTM is the population from which a cardiovascular program could reasonably expect to draw patient referrals. The TCTM geographic area usually reflects the distance that individuals will travel for sophisticated heart care. The TCTM methodology is supported with a consideration for geographic and social barriers, physician referral patterns, outreach efforts, and planned growth and practice expansion opportunities.

Once the TCTM is determined, a thoroughly planned and well-executed marketing effort can be undertaken. The tried and true marketing processes that are associated with successful organizations are recommended with a distinct focus on cardiac clinical services. The elements identified most often as essential to positive results are:

1. Develop a plan. It is estimated that only approximately 60 percent of all businesses work from a plan with predetermined, measurable goals.
2. Evaluate the efforts and the results. Business and industry report very few marketing projects are measured for outcomes and community responsiveness.
3. Spend time and energy in defining the measurement standards. Many organizations can't define "good" marketing and document a Return on Investment (ROI).
4. Research the market. Who better to ask how you could better serve than those who access care as well as those who are in the TCTM but travel to another facility for cardiac services that are already available at your hospital.

The best way to master the changing market forces that healthcare providers are experiencing is to focus on core competencies and strive to be the "best" both clinically and financially. The key to success is identifying exactly what clinical services will be provided and benchmarking to measure results. This encompasses integrating marketing and many facets of hospital operations. Once accomplished, communicating (marketing) to your community (TCTM) through a service-specific marketing effort can reap new patient volume and achieve financial goals in cardiovascular services.

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