

## Few Marketing Tools to Communicate and Promote the Vaccination Campaigns

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### Abstract

*A health system that is, in its turn, healthfully conceived, implemented and managed, and that is mainly focused on preventing the medical conditions that may alter the population's health, can have a major contribution to reducing the costs involved in treating and curing various diseases. In order to achieve this, the health decision makers need to initiate and conduct information campaigns for the population, on the subject of knowing and applying the most suitable illness prevention methods. In this paper, we aim to present briefly a few of the marketing tools through which the responsible health actors can communicate to various audiences about the advantages of illness prevention through vaccination campaigns.*

**Key words:** marketing, communication, tools, vaccine, campaigns

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### 1. Introduction

As part of the tertiary sector, the health services provided within a country are aimed towards ensuring the physical and mental health of both an individual, or a community, and its entire population. Through the measures taken, these services can create the premise of a healthy life and can contribute to the harmonious development of the young generation and to a fulfilling life led by the adult population; they can also ease the elderly care process.

Due to globalization, enhanced international relations, increased human circulation etc., a closer and tighter cooperation and collaboration is necessary between the health representatives and decision makers from different states, so that through combined efforts, and often with the support of global health organizations, it is possible to maintain or improve the health status of the population from increasingly extended areas.

Depending on the level of economic development, each country can approach in a different manner illness prevention and ensuring a proper health status, both at an individual and at society level.

One of the means used by the decision makers from high level positions within the national health systems is represented by initiating and conducting national vaccination campaigns, aimed at both the young population (comprised of children of various ages, from newborns to adolescents) and the adult population (from young adults to elders), depending on the type of disease for which immunization is sought, on the severity of the consequences of an epidemic, as well as on other specific factors. In order to ensure a proper health status for new generations, the decision makers from the health ministers or departments mainly aim to immunize children from the very first moments of birth, thus trying to prevent their illnesses, to reduce the risk of epidemics and to diminish, as much as possible, the unwanted, or even tragic, consequences of these diseases.

In general, vaccination is mandatory for certain diseases or age groups affected by them; however, in most cases, the decision to vaccinate is made by either the individual himself (if he is major and responsible) or by his parents, tutors or legal representatives. In order to obtain the expected reaction from the target audiences of the vaccination campaigns or from those that can decide in their name, decision makers need to properly inform all the actors involved.

This paper does not intend to be either for or against vaccination, but rather to illustrate how, through specific means of marketing communication, the decision makers can honestly inform the population, can influence the attitude of the individuals deciding their own vaccination or that of another individual in their care, can acknowledge the importance of the steps taken to reduce the number of illnesses and to reduce the risks posed by them and, thus, can increase the number of adherents to the cause of the vaccination campaigns.

## **2. Few Aspects Regarding the Marketing of Health Services**

From a theoretical and also practical standpoint, marketing approaches have been adopted and applied not only in an economic environment, but also in non-profit organizations, so as to attract new members, funds and support, through a judicious use of marketing tools (Armstrong, Kotler, 2015, pp. 31-32). Due to interferences between the economic and social fields, many of the areas of marketing specialization, including the health area, are delimited with a certain degree of relativity (Balaure, et al., 2002, p. 73). At the border between services marketing and social marketing, the marketing of health services is characterized by a series of specific traits, which differentiate it from other types of services. Thus, the important decisions are mostly taken on high levels of decision (ministry, department of health etc.), and aim to set the framework for conceiving and implementing the state health politics. This framework is materialized mainly by the organizations providing health services to the population (family medicine offices, polyclinics, hospitals etc.). At the same time, the organization of the system and the operation of specific activities are subject to legal regulations and constraints, as they aim to satisfy the health needs at both individual and society level. The health services market does not always strictly follow economic rules. According to opinions from the specialized literature, the needs are stringent and spontaneous, which causes the triggering of demand simultaneously with the emergence of need, and syncing demand with supply is made under more difficult conditions, due to the high training of the medical staff (Olteanu, 2005, p. 126). Basically, the supply is predominantly established at government level (even in the sphere of private sanitary system, for instance, the number of pharmacies on a certain area or the activity of the private medical offices are determined in accordance with specific legal regulations), the demand (with the exception of the emergency services) is determined especially by the volume of insurances, and the prices, most often, are not influenced by the demand and supply. In general, the individual consumers of health services cannot properly appreciate the quality of the product received, because they do not have the necessary knowledge and skills. The medical staff, depending on the work field (family doctor, polyclinic, hospital etc.) and type of property of the organization it is part of (public or private), most often cannot act in accordance with the efficiency requirements of the activity. Naturally, in turn, the marketing mix has numerous particularities. The concept of product can be analyzed based on the approaches met in marketing literature (Kotler, et al, 1998, pp. 653-654; Balaure, et al, 2002, p. 339), and also in the services marketing literature (Lejeune, 1989, p. 24; Olteanu, 2005, pp. 167-170). In health services, the global product is the result of an entire set of activities, through which basic, auxiliary, supplementary and potential unitary products are generated, and through which utility is created. The basic product is an answer to the stringent health needs, the auxiliary product ensures the minimum basic conditions needed to realize the basic product, the supplementary product adds an extra utility to the basic product, thus allowing differentiation from the competition, and the potential product offers a higher level of customization of the health services. Setting the price depends on many important factors: the financing mode, the number of payers, the type and degree of health insurances, the type of services provided etc. The health services distribution is made directly (for example, family doctor – patient), as well as indirectly (for instance, when a specialist's consult is also required). Communication and promotion politics can be at a microeconomic level (organizations involved in providing medical services), as well as at a

macroeconomic level (depending on the manner of organization, it can be managed at a ministry or department level etc.), and can be targeted at both the internal public (its own staff) and at different categories of external public (patients, public institutions, mass-media etc.), depending on the specific objectives pursued.

### 3. Marketing Communications Used to Promote Vaccination Campaigns

As seen in the specialized literature, health services allow for the physical, mental and social welfare of their consumers, through specific functions, as follows: the function of promoting health (information about staying healthy and reducing illnesses); the function of preventing illnesses (through prevention services and periodical medical checks); the curative function (treating illnesses, the recovery or relief of the patient's sufferings); the health rehabilitation function (the recovery of the individual's health condition by providing specific services) (Rădulescu, 2008, p. 17). By their specifics, health services contribute to increasing the quality of people's lives, and the quality of health services also causes the growth of consumers' trust in the providers' actions. In accordance with specialists' opinion, trust is the essence in services' provision, and the service's credibility is appreciated by consumers after the provision process is over (Cetină, et al, 2009, p. 35).

In most cases, it is difficult for many health services providers to gain the patients' trust in the quality of the services to be received, for reasons related to the patient's personality (the level of training and understanding of the medical act, fear or mistrust in the medical personnel's competences to diagnose or treat correctly), to the personnel that is providing these services (attitude, level of training, reputation, communication with the patient etc.), to the elements that are part of the interior or exterior physical setting of the service provision (ambiance, facilities, equipment) etc.

Even though trust is gained after the service has been provided, there are numerous cases in which, through promotional actions performed in an organized, correct and balanced manner, the offer promised meets the offer delivered, whether the communication and promotion efforts were made at an organization level or higher. Depending on the situation, the goals and objectives, and the target audience, these communication and promotion campaigns can be initiated, implemented and managed by decision makers at high levels.

According to legal regulations covering the Romanian health system (Law 95/2006), the main functions of public health assistance refer to: epidemiological surveillance, illnesses prevention and control, preventing epidemics, including establishing the epidemiological health condition, informing, educating and communicating in order to promote health. Among the methods that can be used to accomplish these functions is population vaccination, both children and adults.

In our country, the national vaccination program is endorsed by *Comitetul National de Vaccinologie* (The National Vaccination Committee), and *Institutul National de Sanatate Publica* (The National Institute of Public Health), through *Centrul National de Supraveghere si Control al Bolilor Transmisibile* (The National Center for Surveillance and Control of Transmissible Diseases), has the mission to materialize the program.

In accordance with the objectives of the national immunization plan, vaccination is realized not only to protect newborns and children of serious contagious diseases, but also to improve the health of the entire population. Regarding children, based on *Calendarul national de vaccinare* (The National Vaccination Calendar), there are vaccines that can be administered from the very first moments of birth (such as the hepatitis B vaccine, in the first 24 hours), afterwards continuing with different immunizations up to the age of 14 years. Besides these vaccines, which are included in the national plan and funded by the state, there are a number of optional vaccines, aimed at different target audiences (pregnant women, adults, children, travelers in countries with epidemiological risk), made at doctors' recommendation (*Institutul National de Sanatate Publica Romania*, 2017; *Asociatia "Acces la Sanatate"*, *Societatea Nationala de Medicina de Familie*, 2017).

With the goal of supporting the national vaccination program of the *Ministry of Health* of Romania, a series of studies and researches have been made over time, regarding some of the most important aspects related to vaccination. Thus, in 2013, *Asociatia Romana pentru Promovarea Sanatatii* (The Romanian Association for Health Promotion) conducted the study "Directii

*Strategice pentru Dezvoltarea Programului de Vaccinare si Promovare a Vaccinarii*”(Strategic Directions for Developing the Vaccination Program and Promoting Vaccination) (ARPS, 2012, pp. 13, 20-21, 40-41). The target audience was represented by 1162 family doctors from Romanian settlements with more than 50.000 inhabitants, and of these, 71% were vaccinators. According to the results of this study, over half of the vaccinator doctors considered that the main reasons which led to the parents' refusal to vaccinate their children were related to the lack of education and the poor level of information about the vaccines. Taking into consideration the results of the conducted research, a SWOT analysis was made within the same study; this analysis illustrated that even though there is a multi-sectoral interest in health and health promotion, the failure or confusion of certain preventive interventions have had a negative impact on the population's trust in vaccination.

Through specific marketing approaches, judiciously elaborated, the vaccination campaigns can be brought to the public's attention more easily, and the act of informing the public about the benefits of vaccination (by the responsible factors involved) can be more efficient, provided that it is realized in an honest and transparent manner.

Communicating with the various audiences is made differently, depending on the category of the target audience (medical services providers, for instance for the family doctor, the final patient or its tutor etc.), on the objectives pursued (prevention, eradication etc.), on the type of disease against which the vaccination is done, on the scale of the action (vaccination campaigns can run locally, regionally, nationally or even on wider areas, involving more countries). The action can be performed in several successive stages, through specific communication and promotion techniques.

In our country, pro-vaccination campaigns that run nationally are usually initiated by the *Ministry of Health* and can be aimed not only at family doctors, doctors from school offices or other categories of medical services providers that have the legal right to provide these services, but also at the final consumers of these services or their legal representatives. There could also be cases of vaccination campaigns running in Romania that are initiated at European or global level. For instance, for several years (since 2005), the European Region celebrates *European Immunization Week* in April, as part of the *World Health Organization's* campaign entitled *World Immunization Week* (*World Health Organization, European Immunization Week*, accessed on 28.05.2017). This campaign, that takes place in Romania as well, illustrates the importance of vaccination in preventing diseases and protecting people's lives.

The programs to promote vaccination campaigns can have various objectives, such as: raising people's level of information regarding a certain type of vaccine, the benefits of vaccination and the vaccination calendar, improving the patients' or their tutors' attitude towards vaccination, raising doctors' interest in performing vaccines, raising awareness or convincing the public opinion representatives about the benefits of vaccination etc. During the vaccination promotion campaigns, messages can be transmitted through certain specific marketing communication tools, means and techniques, through well organized and coordinated approaches. During these campaigns, direct communication channels (such as the direct communication between the doctor and the patient), as well as indirect communication channels can be used. Different promotion techniques can be used, based on the campaign initiator (national structure, global organization etc.), on the aimed objectives, on the scale of the campaign (local, regional, national etc.), on the target audience (medical services providers, intermediaries, patients, tutors or legal representatives of patients etc.); the effectiveness of the campaign will be higher if it takes place within an integrated marketing communication system.

One of the most recommended methods of communication in health marketing is represented by the **public relation** activity, especially for the government initiated campaigns. Interviews in written and audiovisual media, press communications and conferences led by the decision makers from the Ministry in a relatively accessible language can reach the attention of various categories of target audience (medical services providers, family doctors' patients, adolescents, parents of little children of vaccination age, elder people or people with a high risk of illness), and can also reveal the factors responsible for the vaccination campaigns, can emphasize the benefits of vaccination in a transparent manner, the risks involved with the refusal to vaccinate, the side effects of vaccines on the physical and mental health, indications and contraindications etc. The efficiency of these actions is increased especially if they supported by other communicational means, such as **advertising**. The goals of the vaccination campaigns are accomplished or even amplified through

advertising, which can be: mass-media advertising (messages broadcasted at public or private radio or television, with national, regional or local coverage), exterior advertising (posters, billboards, light signs etc. located inside medical units or near areas of public interest), printed advertising (leaflets, prospectuses, flyers etc.) that can be distributed in the family doctors' offices, clinics, polyclinics, medical analysis laboratories, pharmacies, educational units or other institutions frequented by children or their parents, adolescents (sports schools, scientific circles, fitness halls, beauty or piercing salons etc.).

Moreover, pro-vaccination campaigns can also be promoted through medical caravans, where teams of few doctors can travel to different areas of the country and approach the topic of vaccination **orally**, clearly and using an accessible language. During these trips, the audience can watch documentaries. These documentaries can educate and inform the public, especially from the rural areas or the less developed regions of the country, where there is limited the access to other communication media and the family medicine offices are very far. As a result of the technological evolution, one of the most used means of marketing promotion is **direct marketing**. Based on realizing a database as large as possible, direct marketing approaches can be made through the Internet, mobile phone and especially social networks. The messages can be sent to a large number of users, allowing for a quick informing of the targeted public.

Although there are many legal and moral issues that prevent from using the entire set of marketing promotion and communication tools and techniques within the medical services domain, the promotional approaches presented above, alongside other communicational activities, can help implement and run vaccination campaigns successfully.

#### 4. Conclusions

Initiated for the purpose of preventing illnesses, of limiting the spread of certain diseases, of eradicating certain diseases, of improving people's health etc., the vaccination campaigns can be brought to the target audience's attention and can be promoted through specific marketing communication tools and techniques. Assimilated and applied properly, the marketing instruments can be used – customized accordingly, in the social sphere, in supporting humanitarian causes etc. If initiated and implemented objectively, in an honest and realist manner (by decision makers which usually involve central positions within the health system), and based on specific marketing communications (such as: public relations, direct marketing, oral communication or social-humanitarian advertising), the campaigns to promote vaccination can help inform in an appropriate manner the target audience about the specifics, running time and duration of the campaigns, the benefits of vaccination and the related risks, and can help raise the interest of various categories of public towards vaccination and improve people's attitude about how vaccination can contribute to maintaining a proper health status.

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