COVID-19

Vaccine Communications

—

Strategies and Principles to Guide Hospitals and Health Systems

American Hospital Association™

Advancing Health in America

SHSMD
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Strategy & Market
Development™

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PREFACE

The COVID-19 Vaccine Communications Toolkit was developed as a guide through the steps involved in planning, designing and executing a vaccine communications plan and campaign.

The following information highlights the strategies and experiences of health care marketing and communications professionals and emerged from the December 2020 Society for Health Care Strategy & Market Development (SHSMD) Vaccine Distribution and Communications: A SHSMD Member Collaborative Workshop.

This information will be updated as new resources, tools and examples become available.

CONTENTS

DEVELOP THE BROAD VISION AND GOALS OF THE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

KEY INSIGHTS

- Establishing guiding principles can help establish the overall tone and approach of the communication strategy.

- Many health care organizations are developing plans that focus on educating and serving as a trusted source for accurate information instead of pushing the vaccine.

CASE EXAMPLES

UNC Health developed a set of core truths to help guide development of its COVID-19 Vaccine Hub:

- There is a crisis of consumers not trusting they will be safe.

- Success will require action, not just communication.

- Nuance is required to deliver both broad and more targeted story threads.

- Routine vaccines are at risk.

These core truths helped UNC Health refine its approach:

- Be educational, not coercive.

- Open minds and overcome skepticism.

- Provide the facts: national leaders and UNC Health's own health care experts.

- Foster consistency and transparency about the vaccine, vaccination rates and the pandemic.

- Help leaders lead their teams.

Spectrum Health identified the principles that would underlie its COVID-19 vaccine communications strategy by asking: What do we need the communications to solve?

- Answer questions, build trust and provide clarity by providing timely, transparent and science-based information.

- Meet people where they are in terms of their perspectives about the vaccine. Be empathetic, not transactional or coercive.

- Motivate and inspire people to come together collectively to fight this pandemic.

- Reinforce the need for continuing preventative measures, testing and seeking out appropriate care when needed.

- Help people understand what is next through clear and consistent updates about the vaccine, distribution plans and the pandemic.

- Help internal leaders reinforce all key messages with their teams.

- Educate medical staff to have conversations with their patients.

IDENTIFY THE AUDIENCES

KEY INSIGHTS

- Key audiences include internal and external audiences as well as targeted and general audiences.

- Three audience categories should be considered:

  - **Internal:** team members and medical staff

  - **Consumers:** all consumers and targeted consumer groups

  - **Community:** community leaders, partnering organizations, employers, schools and others

- Specific audiences can receive targeted messaging:

  - Hospital employees, front-line caregivers, patients and family members

  - Communities of color

  - Communities with non-English-speaking individuals

- Audiences can also be segmented based on mindset:

  - Ready and willing

  - Neutral and information seeking

  - Skeptical, but open minded

CASE EXAMPLES

Spectrum Health organized its messaging goals around three audiences:

- Adopters: "Yes, I will take the vaccine right away."

- Skeptics: "No, I'll will wait and see."

- General: "I am not sure. I need more information."

UT Southwestern Medical Center developed a vaccine Frequently Asked Questions page in Spanish (Preguntas Frecuentes sobre la Vacuna Contra el COVID).

CREATE A MESSAGING FRAMEWORK

KEY INSIGHTS

- Messaging framework will vary depending on communications goals, audiences and resources. Remember that there is no one way to do this.

- The frameworks should be flexible to allow for pivoting as new vaccine developments and distribution plans emerge.

CASE EXAMPLES

UNC Health used a messaging framework based on educating audiences about the vaccine with more specific targeted messaging organized around three pillars (Prepare Our People, Prepare Our Community, Provide the Best Experience) and audiences (Ready & Willing, Unsure & Needs More Information, Skeptical & Critical).

GET EDUCATED (ON THE COVID VACCINE)				
This is Your Shot				
Audiences				
Coworkers	Facility Workers	High-Risk patients	Providers	Etc.

Prepare Our People	Prepare Our Community	Provide the Best Experience
Objectives: • Build trust • Encourage participation • Align on UNCH POV	Objectives: • Create interest • Build trust • Build demand	Objectives: • Answer demand • Easy access • Introduce to UNCH
CTAs: • It's important • It's safe • Rigorous testing	CTAs: • It's important • It's safe • Rigorous testing	CTAs: • It's here • Find out if it's covered • Spread the word

OVERARCHING MESSAGE		

READY & WILLING	UNSURE & NEEDS MORE INFORMATION	SKEPTICAL & CRITICAL

Spectrum Health designed messaging goals and key messages around three pillars: Help, Inform, Inspire.

JOBS TO DO	HELP Provide clarity on how and when to get help.	INFORM Provide clarity and be a source of truth.	INSPIRE Lead a movement that brings us together in this fight.
Messaging Goals			
Key Messages			
Detailed Messages			

DEVELOP EFFECTIVE MESSAGING

KEY INSIGHTS

- Transparency is crucial — what we know about the vaccine as well as what we do not know.

- Empathy and understanding are critical when crafting vaccine-related outreach. The circumstances around development and distribution of the vaccine mean it is as much an emotional journey as an objective, cerebral one.

- Polls — both internal and external — can be used to gauge interest in vaccinations as well as concerns and help with the crafting of appropriate audience messages.

- Fact-based and educational information can help combat the anti-vaccine content and general skepticism.

CASE EXAMPLES

UNC Health developed a communications strategy that uses "This Is Your Shot" as the common thread through the messaging, microsite content ("This Is Your Shot to Rest Assured," "This Is Your Shot to Understand") and a manifesto. Executive leaders also signed a pledge to receive the vaccine when available.
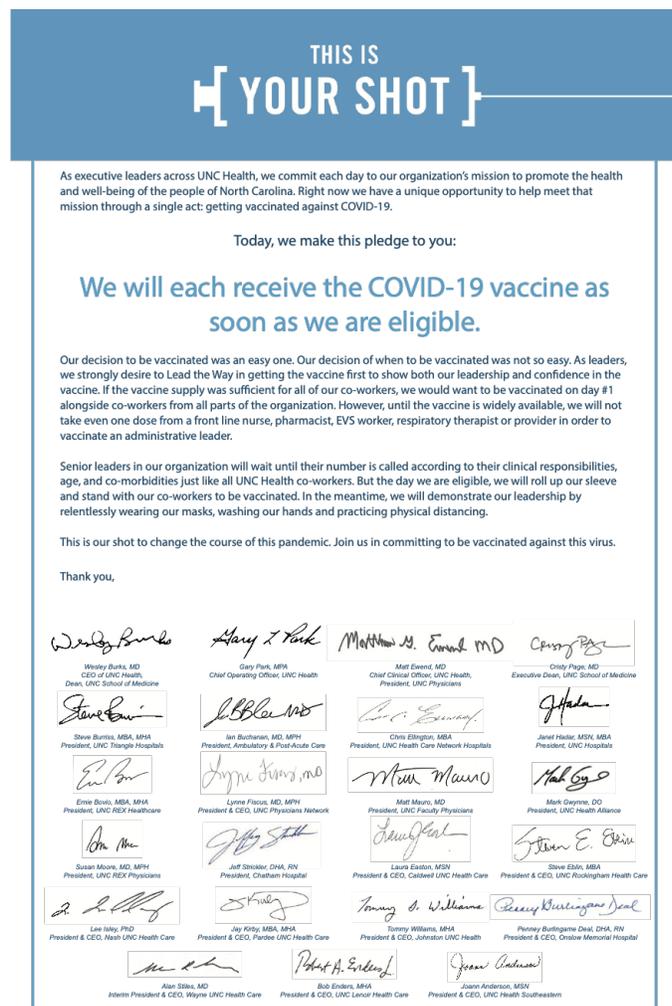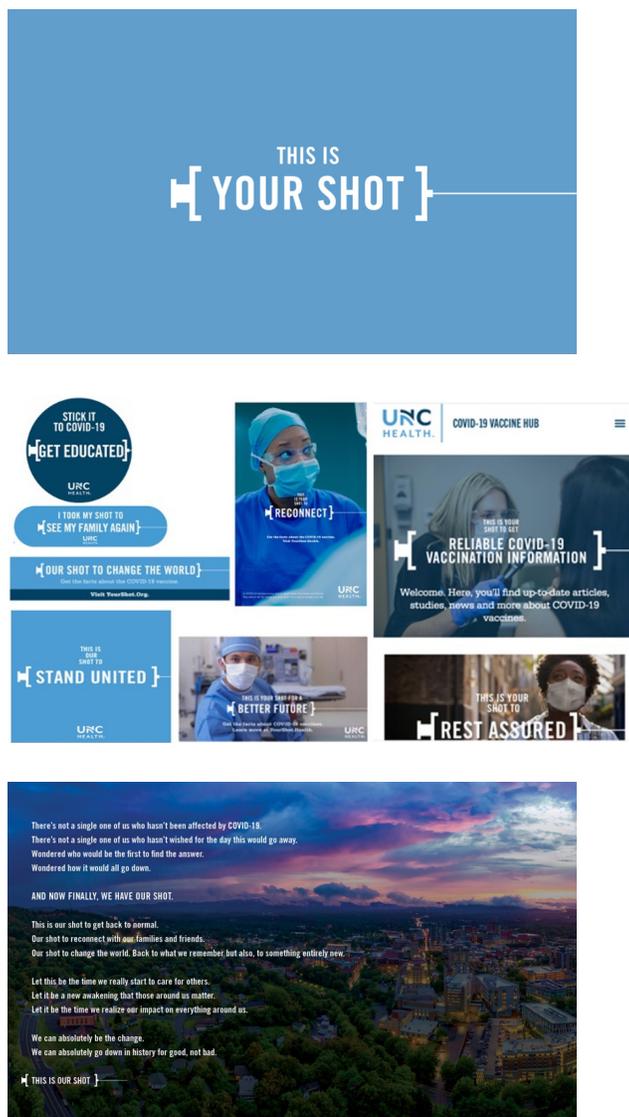
TidalHealth created a series of "I'm being vaccinated because..." posters featuring clinicians.

The **Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center** is providing information and updates about local and state vaccine distribution plans from the Texas Department of State Health Services. In addition to details about the Texas COVID-19 Vaccination Plan, the site provides contact information for campus contacts in groups across the system.

Another health care organization's "The Why" campaign asked team members to discuss why they received the vaccine. These responses were used on posters and in videos.

A health care organization is putting together packets for the media that include still photographs of caregivers receiving the vaccine. The goal is to "record history" and document these milestone events.

DETERMINE THE BEST WAYS TO REACH YOUR TARGET AUDIENCES

KEY INSIGHTS

- A multi-channel approach is important, especially when the public starts to receive vaccinations.

- Social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube), videos and podcasts are effective ways to distribute vaccination information widely and quickly, both internally and externally.

- Live sessions and community town hall events can connect leadership, clinicians and experts to a wide audience.

- Microsites are a useful medium for providing up-to-the-minute information.

- Other lower-tech communications channels can also be good ways to reach audiences (e.g., walking rounds and face-to-face talks with staff, printed materials).

- Internal and external messengers and influencers are essential in delivering vaccine information.

CASE EXAMPLES

The UNC Health COVID-19 Vaccine Town Hall was a virtual event featuring clinicians, researchers and educators from **UNC Health** and the UNC School of Medicine.

UNC Health also used YouTube to distribute a video of the first COVID-19 vaccinations administered at its facilities.

As part of its COVID-19 Vaccination Communication Toolkit, the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** is offering printable posters and stickers, slide presentations, social media sample messages (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) and a video about COVID-19 vaccine recommendations.

Spectrum Health organized a Diverse Communities Vaccine Advisory Council early on to inform its efforts to reach communities of color. The council comprises providers from across the system, including direct-care clinicians who will be critical in delivering vaccination messages in their communities.

TRACK SUCCESS METRICS

KEY INSIGHTS

- Tracking key performance indicators (KPIs) will indicate which strategies are effective, how a communications plan might pivot, and what future communications and outreach activities should be priorities.

- KPIs can include the following:

  – Vaccination rates among team members, health care providers/medical staff, independent medical staff, patients/community members and community influencers

  – Employee participation in and engagement with education efforts

  – Engagement metrics (e.g., page views)

  – Glint and other employee surveys

  – Brand tracker measurement

OTHER RESOURCES

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION:

COVID-19 Vaccination Communication Toolkit

COVID-19 Vaccination Information for You and Your Family

COVID-19 Vaccination Information for Healthcare Professionals

AMERICAN HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION:

COVID-19 Vaccine Communications and Distribution

UNC HEALTH:

COVID-19 Vaccine Hub

SPECTRUM HEALTH:

COVID-19 Vaccine Information Center