

Cancer organizations get marketing tips from consumer brands to improve patient education

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Healthcare organizations are getting outreach tips from big consumer brands. Five patient advocacy groups have started a collaboration with consumer companies to help cancer organizations form better one-to-one relationships with their patients.

Launched by the Harvard Business School Kraft Precision Medicine Accelerator, the program is bringing together five patient advocacy groups -- the Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation, LUNGevity Foundation, the Metastatic Breast Cancer Alliance, the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network, and the Prostate Cancer Foundation -- with consumers brands such as Marriott, Reebok, and Rent the Runway.

"The way these foundations are going to get better at one-to-one patient marketing is not necessarily by looking at other foundations doing it marginally better," said Lori Marcus, chair of the Direct-to-Patient workstream of the Kraft Accelerator and vice chair of MMRF.

The impetus for the program was a study from the MMRF that identified cancer patients' knowledge gaps and determined three steps to address them that can be applied to several types of cancer.

The study found that there are three decisions cancer patients need to make: the right team, right tests, and right treatment. Each group's website features "Right Track" steps and has tips and searchable databases to help patients find the right doctors, tests, and treatments.

"They're all aligned on common language and common graphic treatment," Marcus said. "The reason that's important is because it's simplified and starts to diffuse the noise cacophony of messages. There are hundreds of millions being spent by academic medical centers and pharma companies, and everybody says it slightly different and patients are generally confused."

Another goal of the Right Track program is to dispel misconceptions identified in the study, specifically about clinical trials, data sharing, and precision medicine.

Across the five cancer organizations, only about half of patients had heard of precision medicine, according to the research. Patients also felt they needed more information about clinical trials before participating in one, with the highest percentage from patients affiliated with the LUNGevity Foundation (57%).

When it comes to sharing data, patients were more comfortable sharing their genomic or clinical information than their contact information. In each patient group, more than 85% of patients were willing to share their data.

The Right Track program also encourages patients to share data at each step of the process and help others who have cancer.

“We're now in this era of precision medicine and had a hunch, because we're in touch with so many patients every day, that there were indeed gaps in knowledge and behavior,” said Anne Quinn Young, SVP of marketing and communications at the MMRF. “There is evidence in a number of cancers that it's important where you're treated and how you're treated. That's why we're very focused on if we can move the needle together.”

This story was updated on June 28 to clarify the collaboration process between nonprofits and brands.

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