

Talking the Right Talk: Learning to Communicate—and Relate—with Physicians

While communication woes can happen with a variety of people, many in healthcare say they wish they felt more comfortable interacting with their medical staff. There's an inherent challenge in learning how to speak the language of a customer who's often short on time—but who's an integral part of your marketing strategy.

Physicians are not likely to change their approach to match yours, so if you want communication to be enhanced, it's up to you. Here are some suggestions to enhance your communication with the medical staff.

- **Be prepared.** This is critical with physicians. Detail the background, prepare your questions and make sure you have clearly defined your goals for the meeting.
- **Do some deductive decision-making.** Physicians make a living by hearing the specifics and then formulating a diagnosis or conclusion. Provide them with an overview of the process followed by the outcomes. Presenting a logical pathway makes it easier for them to follow.
- **Limit brainstorming.** Because most physicians are logical, deductive reasoners, they don't like to just "toss out" ideas. Their approach is to think through the process and outcomes for each idea—which makes for very challenging brainstorming. Besides, if they go along with the brainstorming, their tendency (reinforced by years of training) is to wonder where you are headed. Physicians assume you have an agenda and an outcome. Make sure your interest in their input is genuine—and save their time.
- **Communicate at the physicians' pace and style.** Match your pace and approach to the physician. The "doctor-is-very-busy" thinking creates a tendency to go fast, rather than giving physicians time to think through the process and respond.
- **Summarize.** Review the process and outcomes, cover the next steps and discuss plans for follow-up, including timelines. This ensures that you both heard the same thing, and that the physician knows what he needs to do and what to expect from you. This protects you from the physician who says, "That's not what I said . . ."
- **Set realistic goals.** Sometimes it takes more than one meeting to get a "blessing," to understand the physician's concerns or resolve the problem. Be prepared to move at her speed. Keep in mind that this may not be the only meeting you need with the physician. Factor this into the timeline so your project is not rushed at the last minute.

