

Rome, April 11th 2022

PATIENT CENTRICITY IN DIGITAL HEALTHCARE MARKETING

TODAY THE PATIENT IS AT THE CENTER OF THE ENTIRE PHARMA ECOSYSTEM. IN THIS EVOLVING SCENARIO, IN A FEW YEARS' TIME, THE CONSOLIDATED PRODUCT-ORIENTED VISION OF PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES HAS GIVEN WAY TO STRATEGIES BASED ON PATIENT CENTRICITY. POLK&UNION, A DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AGENCY SPECIALIZED IN INTEGRATED MARKETING, HAS ANALYZED THE CONTEXT AND THE CHALLENGES TO FACE.

What is patient centricity

Since long, Healthcare and Pharma players cannot afford to ignore **patient centricity**. **Digital transformation has accelerated changes in relationships between patients and healthcare companies.**

Similarly to what has already happened in other areas, **patients** – like consumers in general – have also become more **conscious and informed** and it would be wrong to still consider them passive users of treatments prescribed by doctors. Over time, objectives and strategies in the Healthcare and Pharma market have changed, affecting the way companies relate to patients and communicate with them. In an increasingly crowded and competitive scenario, instead of just communicating with professionals, pharmaceutical companies need **to engage more and better in a dialogue with healthcare users**, necessarily applying a multi-channel approach.

In 2017 AstraZeneca published a **collaborative definition of patient centricity in the pharmaceutical field** in [BMJ Innovations](#): *'Putting the patient first in an open and sustained engagement of the patient to respectfully and compassionately achieve the best experience and outcome for that person and their family'*. This definition was achieved after having worked



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with patients and healthcare professionals, associating it with a number of guidelines that biopharmaceutical companies were to apply as a basis for this involvement: **the decoupling education/information, the principle of co-creation, easy access and transparency.**

Today a number of processes built around patients lead to the development of specific services focusing on their needs, so they can become increasingly capable of knowing and understanding their health situation, of participating in it very closely in various ways and of being able to access **therapies and information they deem reliable.**

With the **growth of digital health**, this approach has become even more embedded in the processes and strategies of pharmaceutical companies. Not only that: **patient centrality in healthcare marketing and communication** now plays a decisive role.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also amplified the changes already underway in the Pharma world. PatientView, a British institution that has been working with patient organizations around the world for more than twenty years to connect their voices with those of the medical scientific sector, [lately published a research](#) on how the recent global crisis **redefined the concept of patient centrality in Healthcare**, in particular when setting up clinical trials, and changed the entire Health ecosystem.

The research included the following:

- a more decisive move towards **remote care** (no longer considered an emergency solution, but rather an almost indispensable service)
- greater attention to **personalized assistance** and diversity
- increased awareness shown by patients regarding the processes of pharmaceutical companies, resulting in a request for greater transparency
- a pharmaceutical company **increasingly focused on patient-centricity will have a better reputation** among patient associations.

To learn more read: [5 healthcare marketing trends to follow in 2022](#)

How patient centricity has changed the strategies of Healthcare and Pharma companies

The new approach, increasingly aware of the importance of patient centricity also in **Healthcare marketing and health communication**, has led to significant changes.

As early as 2018, consulting firm [McKinsey noted](#) that less than half of the 184 drugs launched between 2006 and 2011 managed to reach their estimated peak sales five years later. «Focusing too narrowly on clinical value often leads companies to neglect a powerful driver of launch success: the **customer experience**», McKinsey explained, emphasizing how by addressing pain points along patient and prescriber journeys, companies can «increase customer satisfaction, improve adherence, and boost revenues».

A research published by [Deloitte](#) in 2020, resulting from interviews with 27 executives from life sciences companies and patient advocacy/disease research organizations, suggests that organizations working in the Health sector should do all they can to adjust every one of their functions at all levels to what is defined as an «**emerging ecosystem**», in which «*foundations, patient advocacy groups, health plans, health systems and physicians, regulators, competitors, and technology and wellness companies are all better connected so that the patient is at the center*».

An effective strategy focused on patient centricity should necessarily deal with the growth of **patient empowerment**. According to a [recent EU survey](#), one out of two EU citizens (55%) reported having searched online for health information and 20% reported having made an appointment with a healthcare professional via the internet. Nowadays, many of them arrive to the appointment with the specialist already documented and continue to acquire independent information even after they are diagnosed.

Intercepting this interest is essential, not only to bring the patient to know (and choose) the brand but also and above all to offer answers to his needs.

Interaction with patients is becoming increasingly multichannel and requires an accurate analysis of the [customer journey](#) to gather information on their behaviors and study how to

reach them in many cases even before this journey begins. Research on symptoms, indications on therapies, information and comparisons on health services: the answers to these expectations should be found easily, recognized as reliable and consequently prove useful thanks to **quality content that provides value to the "informed" patients**, who wants to feel active protagonists of their own treatment process.

Measuring patient centricity (KPIs) and patient engagement

But how can you know if you've taken the right direction? How do you understand if the changes that you brought about are producing results and if the patient is again at the center of them? In short: **how do you measure patient centricity? What are the KPIs?**

Metrics and objectives may vary, but **patient engagement** is certainly one of the indicators to be taken into account within a digital healthcare marketing strategy.

The elements that can be considered to **measure the patient's experience** include, for example:

- The interaction among the various touchpoints, to follow the patient's journey searching for information
- Direct patient involvement via dedicated website and apps (such as chatbots)
- Patient satisfaction assessment by means of online and offline survey tools (qualitative surveys, quantitative surveys, focus groups, complaints and other signals from users, also traceable through online monitoring).

However, it is always necessary to keep in mind the **particular condition of patients compared to general consumers**. Their knowledge of the complex aspects related to therapy and assistance, despite the considerable amount of information to which they have access, is still in fact limited: this is why it is important to focus on predictive analysis and listening to try to anticipate as much as possible their needs and consequently their expectations. **Assessing patient engagement and the degree of patient satisfaction** provides a clear picture of possible problems regarding services and processes that can be later readjusted to grant more timely and constructive support.

In this context, it is clear that **data are key in this evolving scenario, with a view to an increasing patient centrality.**

The analysis of anonymized data from clients can help companies gain a more detailed view of their needs and behaviors. In fact, data should be organized so as to build **deeper levels of customization** and improve analysis and understanding in order to plan and then create an experience that is as satisfying as possible.

New elements in recent years include a greater amount of **online conversations**, which for the field players are an essential reserve of useful information for each phase of a product's life cycle, before and after its launch up to the **pharmacovigilance processes**. Nonetheless, for many of them this still is uncharted territory, and companies hold a cautious approach, especially considering the legal and privacy aspects.

But it is not only the activity of online patients that is to be considered: doctors remain crucial and the observation of their activities, their learning needs and professional updating also helps gather the information that companies need to build growingly effective strategies. Not only that: a **targeted health communication**, which provides the HCP with a picture that is as clear as possible of the new general needs or fears, can help professionals to better follow their clients, improving their involvement and experience.

Patient centrality as part of digital transformation

Focusing on the patient first of all means changing the mindset. To follow this new development, companies in this sector are required to change their processes, methodologies and metrics, though they are aware that there is no one-size-fits-all strategy.

Therapy, care, communication: besides having a much more active role in therapeutic solutions, patients now require and expect companies to provide a greater amount of services and support tools. A closer relationship between these two subjects should take this into account.

«The digital turning point in the Pharma world does not only apply to communication, but starts from an innovative digital mindset that inspires companies to invest more and more in internal,

*broad and transversal projects, aimed at the **digitalization of infrastructures and processes**», said Polk&Union CEO Tiziano Vitale.*

For over ten years, the Italian American agency has accompanied Pharma companies in their digital transformation process by implementing performance-oriented innovative integrated marketing and digital communication strategies, based on a thorough study of the customer's business context and objectives. In September 2021 it launched its [Healthcare and Pharma division](#) formed by pharmaceutical digital marketing experts with deep knowledge of pharmacovigilance rules.

«Working in Healthcare requires experienced and prepared professionals, capable of thinking and acting according to specific and selective market logics, who can create new dedicated communication and marketing ecosystems - concluded Vitale - The challenges in the field of digital innovation within healthcare are difficult and complex, as are digital technologies, tools and relational models that allow companies to forge a more intense and valuable relationship with the patient».

[Learn more on Polk&Union's Health Division](#)

Information about Polk&Union

Polk&Union Digital Communication Agency was born in San Francisco, California, in 2007 and was named after the crossroads of Polk and Union streets, where its first head office was located. Innovation and internationality are Polk&Union's distinctive traits. With the cross-cultural mindset that is the backbone of its DNA, and the know-how it acquired in the United States – first in San Francisco and then from 2019 in Seattle – in 2011 Polk&Union landed in Rome, Italy, where the agency became an established reference point within the Italian market, supporting companies, organizations and associations in 360-degree digital

communications within the B2B and B2C sector. Its main services include: Integrated Marketing Communication, Content, Digital Media and Digital Technology, together with those specific to the Polk&Union Health division for the Healthcare & Pharma.

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