

Improving access to healthcare: When Knowledge matters more than Science...



The newsletter of



For low income populations, improving access to medicines and healthcare in general requires a truly holistic approach, reaching beyond the traditional “promoting molecules to physicians”.

Obstacles are numerous and diverse

- The widespread lack of awareness about diseases and appropriate treatment options among the general population.
- The limitations of local healthcare providers, public or private who are, often overwhelmed by a high volume of patients (waiting lists extend to several months, consultation time shrinks to a few minutes) sometimes under-qualified and hindered by a poor reputation or plainly too expensive
- The absence of reliable alternatives from traditional medicine, healers and quacks, government and non government workers which rarely provide a panacea:

The consequences are well too known.

- Low diagnosis levels
- Prescription of improper treatments and inadequate medicines
- Distrust for allopathic medicines
- Low adherence to prescriptions especially among patients suffering from “Silent killer” diseases (such as diabetes or hypertension) which are minimally understood



In most countries, these prescriptions are rely on a finite list of classical products ¹, scientifically established for decades and usually available in affordable generic version. Therefore, Science, defined as better efficacy or fewer adverse events, is no longer a differentiating factor when comparing the same molecules. Neither, in most cases, is price or manufacturing quality.

How to create value?

Simply by addressing the unmet pre-requisite: Knowledge.

Communities with limited education, literacy and access to information may rely on traditional notions about diseases, but they often miss critical opportunities to diagnose diseases at an early stage. Suffering men and women visit a health provider only as a last resort.

Many pharmaceutical companies are recognizing the need for information about diseases, as well as the importance of early diagnosis, prevention and the availability of treatments. They may leverage NGOs and public health workers² to deliver such education programs, and encourage adherence (compliance) to prescriptions.

Relevant communication must always suit its target... In this case, this means: being in the right place at the right time (e.g. on market day), speaking the local dialect, and using relevant attention catchers (e.g. theatrical performance, illustrated posters) to name just a few. Moreover, it is crucial that the name of the disease itself be properly understood by the target audience – not an easy task when dialect names may vary considerably, such as for STDs.

These awareness campaigns should not be conducted behind the back of or “against” local health providers. Their presence is valuable, predominantly because they represent the first line of response for the participants, but also because most often, they will also learn something useful...



¹ Largely from WHO's List of Essential Medicines
<http://www.who.int/medicines/publications/essentialmedicines/en/>

² Where legally permissible

More advanced physicians and pharmacists may rely on the same approved scientific information that is used in higher income areas. However, these healthcare professionals should also play an essential role in extending the awareness programs. For this purpose they may use the same tools as those used with the laymen, such as discussion boards or illustrated information leaflets. But these professionals will also benefit from targeted pedagogic tools to help them communicate more efficiently with their patients about specific conditions or diseases, such as anatomy posters.

All these communication tools must be extremely consistent in order to create a flawless “patient experience” In terms of marketing, .this brings into focus the notion of “umbrella branding” or “mega branding” to create differentiation and build trust among both healthcare professionals and patients. We will discuss this topic in another newsletter.

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