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These days, almost everyone on God's earth can rattle off a dozen ad campaigns at the drop of a dime. Some are as iconic in world popular culture as Jesus, or for that matter, The Beatles. Powerful and compelling messages that dwell deep in the synapses for decades. Of course, as marketers we're able to appreciate the brevity of single-minded, highly targeted product claims on a professional level. In fact, our whole MO is to ensure our brands have a competitive edge because—let's face it—it's a matter of life and death in today's crowded marketplace. We certainly don't subscribe to a whole host of product points crudely bundled together and offered up under the guise of a 'core benefit.' No one admires tired, clichéd imagery bereft of originality.

Or perhaps, we do. Because in the world of pharmaceutical advertising,

NOW
APPROVED

is defined thus: The inflammation of the creative tissue which, over time, swells, losing its integrity and purpose, due to external forces. Instead of simplicity there's toxicity. In place of compelling, there is swelling. The trigger for this inflammatory process in creative tissues is two-fold:

1) Initially, because a "best practice" process is not followed routinely, there is a lack of both compliance and/or poor use of the tools available to help guide the creative work.

2) The driving force behind the first point—the "compliment cascade." This is akin to the physiologic complement cascade inherent in the inflammatory process of tissue damage, and the friability of tissue. These sequences of mediators, or complements drive this very inflammation that compromise physiologic tissue integrity.

The creative sketch is called a tissue for good reason. A tissue drawn out for the first time is an exciting moment because at this precise instant it has infinite potential. New to life, it's primed to thrive and possesses the potential to grow into a powerful piece of communication. Yet, in sharp contrast, as in the biological sense,

ADVERTITIS: THE SEARCH

All too often in pharmaceutical advertising, somewhere between the initial idea and the finished product, the communication—and the originality—disappears. **Ross Thomson** and **Craig Sponseller, MD**, explain why it's essential for creative and medical to work seamlessly together

that's about all we've got. Sure, we can point to the omnipresent FDA, ever-stricter regulatory guidance, limitations and mandates that temper any compelling communication. But there still remains an irrefutable truth: Somewhere between the initial creative tissue (the common term used to describe the art directors roughly drawn layout sketch) and the glossy finished ad the communication stopped, well, communicating. It became to all intents and purposes creatively aphasic. By way of illustrating our point, and because we're marketers ourselves, we've given this fundamental breakdown of process and resulting aphasic communication a name... Advertitis™. It's by no means a bona fide medical term, but Advertitis™ is definitely something we should all be concerned about.

The suffix "-itis" by its very definition means inflammation. The condition occurs anywhere in the human body, be it an organ, tissue, joint or a nail. So what word could be more appropriate? Advertitis

the tissue is also delicate and vulnerable—open to compromise, and inflammatory attack. The infiltration of highly invasive and extremely wide-ranging deliberations can easily infect and tear such a delicate fabric beyond all recognition. Unfortunately, many times, defense mechanisms, compromised positions, barter and negotiation are all part of the creative evaluation. In such situations even the creative team can become wide open to change. By this point there is an almost frantic need to make the concepts more correct. In fact, making the concepts more correct becomes the whole goal! Agency, client and the subsequent cycle of research will all continue in their quest to make the concepts even more correct until it says everything or, conversely, absolutely nothing.

ONCE
DAILY

To drive the tissue in the most compelling direction requires the right combination and influences of both creative and medical stakeholders so it grows into its optimal form—a marketing communication that enables a lasting, powerful emotional connection. In this scenario creative and medical work seamlessly together, cultivating each idea to reach its full potential. This is the all-important meld of medical relevance and creative interpretation. In the highly specialized world of medicine, it's critical that creative and medical work side by side to ensure the concepts are being synthesized enough to fully realize this fluid dynamic.

This interaction is one we characterize as the creative/medical MELD, a meld of critical elements that at the outset bring the greatest potential for enduring resilient tissue. Dry factual information does not, and never will, lead to fertile ideation. Unfortunately, medical or scientific representations in the agency environment are more often than not, consultants, physicians who dedicate their expertise part-time to offer guidance or folks with medical science degrees, not marketing degrees. So there's precious little daily or routine connection. These splintered intermittent time frames will undoubtedly begin to infect the friable tissue. How many physician-cum-marketers intuitively think, 'I've embedded myself in the process and jumped in to experience the creative world.' We need them to ask, 'How do I prevent the condition Advertitis?'

Creative Bedside Manner

Mastering patient communication is as much an art form as cre-

ative advertising. Physicians deal with patients who are at all levels of education. Taking the time and having the patience and verbal skills to communicate clinical status, prognosis, and often difficult and devastating information is crucial to strengthening a genuine patient/physician relationship. This is known as bedside manner and physician's good bedside manner varies considerably. Basically, it boils down to one thing—a physician's ability and desire to communicate with individual patients and their caregivers. As much as physicians need to sit down and explain to patients their diseases, prognoses and treatments until they fully understand everything, the same due diligence must happen when addressing the creative team. Both creative and medical need to set expectations together, understand the past and develop a way of communicating as one solid partnership. And they need to re-evaluate their communication and evolve it through routine interaction. Only then will you ensure that each tissue contains the precise alignment of medical relevance and creative execution that will guarantee cellular immunity—the very

FAST ACTING

integrity of the idea. With the right balance, or meld, of creative and medical/scientific relevance few antagonists, if any, will have the status or the wherewithal to argue.

Prognosis for the future

If we look back over the last 25 or 30 years we can see a viral-like inflammatory process has infected an extremely important organ system—the pharmaceutical advertising industry. Similarly to chronic HCV where the liver succumbs to long-standing, vial-driven inflammation, the processes within pharmaceutical advertising have, over time, been either damaged or significantly altered. The result is that the very functionality of our communications has been compromised. The huge advertising reserve that has been able to withstand a multitude of problems over a long period has come to a breaking point. There are fewer emotive, thought-provoking, insightful ideas emerging. Predictability is preferred over originality. Again and again the tendency is to fall back on the expected, the clichéd generic solutions that have run for other products and are so easily adaptable.

Which brings us back to consumer advertising. Our pharmaceutical marketing communication strategy is, in effect, built on the same model employed in consumer advertising. It has been for some time and the results are there for all to see. Flip through the medical journals and detail aids and see for yourself. You'll find a perplexing mess of countless message points, paralysis from the

FOR A CURE

NEW

headline down, subheads and taglines all grappling for the reader's attention. A place proliferated with clichéd happy smiling patients; a medical menagerie on skateboards etcetera and let's not forget the ubiquitous boxing gloves.

Pharmaceutical marketing is fast moving forward into a frontier that will challenge the very nucleus of our skills and our passions. Medical care has dramatically changed in the dimensions that influence where we're headed. It's ever evolving, from scientific advancement and biologic therapies to genetic variations and personalized medicine. The biggest hurdle will be to ensure that the creative solution embraces these challenges within advancing medical science, and regulatory restrictions so it resonates with where we're going. We need to reassess our approach, and employ a different model and a different set of tools that can adapt to the very fluid dynamics that are undoubtedly ever-present around us. Advertitis has to be prevented or controlled to the best of our abilities. The time for change is now. ■

The Creative Clinicians Consulting Group can be reached at www.advertitis.com