

PREVENTIVE HEALTH CARE: A MARKETING APPROACH

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Abstract

This article addressed the applicability of marketing concepts to the delivery of community health programs, with specific emphasis on health promotion. The realization that marketing has much to offer community health is not new. However, the article "highlights" health promotion and develops a framework that integrates the goals, action criteria and feasible actions that can lead to behavioral and environmental changes conducive to health.

Introduction and Overview

Community health-care planning is a recognized complex task that is desperately needed. An integral part of health-care planning is the determination of health needs and status of people living within specified geographical areas. The accomplishment of this task allows health officials to more efficiently allocate health resources.

During its development as a profession, community health has placed too much emphasis on evaluating the morbidity status of the general population. As Kotler (1975) points out, "too many health officials see their job as curative--this is, to treat outbreaks of illness--rather than preventive--to create a climate that produces good health." The validity of Kotler's statement is seen in the World Health Organization's conception of health. According to it, "health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." What affects the social well-being of an individual, family, or community groups affects them physically and mentally as well. The best way to attain and maintain well-being is to prevent illness and promote health. This orientation of prevention requires substantial creativity and innovation.

The application of marketing tools and techniques to the health care area is essential if goals and objectives are to be reached within the constraints of available resources. Health care efforts must become more actively involved in consumer analysis, market segmentation, promotion (advertising, personal selling, publicity), pricing, product/service presentation, and distribution (delivery) considerations.

The Conceptual Framework

In developing a conceptual framework, consideration was given to analyzing the phases of a community health agency's outreach program. These phases include: (1) goals; (2) awareness level; (3) client action; and (4) evaluation through feedback. Additionally, the contributions of other scholars who have addressed the role of marketing concepts in health services were incorporated in devising the framework.

Summary and Implications

Marketing theorists and practitioners have a great deal to offer community health officials. This realization is not new, as is evidenced by the direct involvement of marketing specialists in various non-profit organizations (i.e., hospitals, schools, government agencies). This

article presents an effort at "highlighting" one particular area of health (health promotion) and develops a framework that integrates the goals, action criteria and feasible actions that can lead to behavioral and environmental changes conducive to health. Such a framework provides an opportunity for decision-makers to determine more efficient means of allocating scarce resources. The conceptual model gives an overview of the system from a marketing perspective, thereby giving the health practitioners a broader view of present actions that should aid in the planning process. A marketing planning process does not guarantee that public community health goals will be realized but it serves as a bridging gap mechanism between marketers and health professionals toward more useful implementation actions.

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