



Communications Plan

2019-2023

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Background

In 2015, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funded the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD) to collaborate with the Endocrine Society and PATH to build partnerships to improve laboratory measurements of chronic disease biomarkers. Through this collaboration, PATH has developed strategic and communications plans to accomplish its mission. During its April 22, 2016 meeting, PATH identified the following objectives, audiences, messages, tactics and opportunities as part of a communication strategy.

Objectives

1. Build greater understanding among the public, media, policymakers, clinicians and researchers of the need for accuracy-based hormone tests in medical practice and research.
2. Encourage device manufacturers and laboratories to develop and provide accurate and reliable hormone tests.
3. Urge research funding agencies and third-party payers to focus their coverage specifically on accuracy-based hormone tests.
4. Cultivate and train expert spokespeople to communicate with the media and policy makers.
5. Position PATH as a trusted source of information on hormone assays and their impact on patient care.

Key Audiences

1. Clinicians
2. Researchers
3. Policymakers
4. Public
5. Media
6. Assay Manufacturers
7. Laboratories
8. Payers

Messages by Audience

1. Clinicians
 - A. Reliable standardized hormone assays exist for many hormones that serve as chronic disease biomarkers, and neglecting to use them may result in over- or diagnosis of medical conditions that might result in under- or over-treatment, which

- in turn could cause some patients to suffer unnecessary and avoidable disease complications.
- B. Accurate standardized hormone tests produce reliable data and help avoid costly errors or misdiagnoses that may have unintended medical consequences and erode the confidence patients have in their providers and in the medical profession.
 - C. Where standardization does not yet exist, the medical community is urged to join with PATH and demand accuracy-based standardization and harmonization of hormone assays.
 - D. Accurate and reliable data enable the universal use and interpretation of laboratory data shared in electronic records.
2. Researchers
- A. Without accurate standardized hormone tests, it is impossible to obtain reliable and reproducible data.
 - B. Accurate standardized hormone assays will benefit researchers by helping them better determine biochemical causes of diseases and disorders and translate research findings into clinical practice.
 - C. Where standardization does not yet exist, the research community is urged to join with PATH and demand accuracy-based standardization of hormone assays.
 - D. Without accurate standardized hormone tests, it is impossible to compare values across research studies.
 - E. Without accurate standardized hormone tests, it is impossible to develop and implement evidence-based clinical decision points.
3. Policymakers
- A. Despite physicians' widespread use of hormone test results, the laboratory measurement of hormones is subject to extreme assay-to-assay variability such that labs could find different results from the same sample leading to missed or false diagnoses.
 - B. Accurate hormone assays lead to fewer medical errors, and eliminate the need for repeat testing, ultimately saving money.
 - C. PATH seeks policies that lead to the development, universal adoption, and standardization of accuracy-based hormone tests.
4. Public and Media
- A. It is often routine for patients to have blood or urine samples sent to laboratories for measurement of specific hormones, but due to lack of accurate assays and standardized practices of measurement, separate labs could find significantly different results from the same sample leading to missed diagnoses or false diagnoses.
 - B. Standardization of accurate hormone tests will give both physicians and their patients greater confidence in test results.

5. Assay Manufacturers
 - A. Accuracy-based quality control and standardization of hormone assays will increase the quality of hormone tests ultimately leading to increased confidence in the tests and greater usage. This will also greatly improve the given manufacturer's competitiveness in the IVD market.
 - B. The CDC Hormone Standardization Program provides quality resources for manufacturers including standard of measurement procedures, reference measurements services, and technical training and consultation on measurements.
6. Laboratories
 - A. Laboratories, particularly those operated by state and local health departments, should only use tests with proven level of accuracy.
 - B. Lack of standardization of accurate hormone assays erodes confidence in test results and laboratories and limit the clinical value of laboratory tests.
 - C. Use of standardized hormone tests will reduce workload in the laboratory.
 - D. The CDC Hormone Standardization Program provides quality resources for laboratories including standard of measurement procedures and study support to assess assay performance and help identify and address measurement problems.
7. Payers
 - A. Standardization of reliable hormone assays will provide measurements that are accurate and comparable across laboratories to minimize inconvenient and costly duplication of laboratory testing.
 - B. Payers should only provide reimbursement for accuracy-based testing, when available.

Tactics and Vehicles

Because other communications will direct audiences to engage with the PATH web site, the most critical communication vehicle for PATH is the website: www.hormoneassays.org. At the April 22nd meeting of the PATH steering committee, members generally agreed that the web site needed significant updates. The PATH strategic plan calls for a task force of PATH members to address needed changes to the web site. An update to the web site should be addressed before other communication tactics and vehicles are employed.

Other vehicles and tactics that will help PATH communicate its messages to its audiences include.

1. Media – The news media, including traditional print and broadcast outlets as well as trade publications, magazines, and bloggers are both an audience and a communication vehicle as they are carriers of messages to the public. There are various methods of engaging the media including:

- a. News Releases – News release should be reserved for when PATH has something new to share with the world. This could include new study results or a recent policy victory.
 - b. Letters to the Editor – Often times the news media will print stories regarding hormone tests and public health. These stories represent opportunities for PATH to submit a letter to the editor to the publication and shed more light on the issue.
 - c. Expert Pitch – Similar to the letter to the editor, the expert pitch looks to capitalize on news of the day. If a story comes out of the *New York Times* about a patient’s tragic story stemming from incorrect lab test results, PATH could invite reporters to speak with an expert on hormone assays. This expert should be a member of PATH and able to communicate the science behind hormone testing in a manner that the general public can appreciate.
2. Social Media – Most of PATH’s audiences identified in this plan are engaged in social media in some manner. Utilizing platforms such as Twitter will provide PATH with an opportunity to engage with their audiences where many relevant virtual conversations are already taking place. By joining in these conversations and re-tweeting posts by other influential stakeholders, PATH will gain visibility as an organization, and raise awareness of the need for standardized accurate hormone assays.
 3. Wikipedia – Though many may argue the reliability of Wikipedia, the truth of the matter is a large percentage of the public consider Wikipedia as a first stop when looking for information. Has PATH examined the Wikipedia entries for hormone assays and relevant pages? As most of the public is unaware of the lack of standardization in hormone testing, it could be beneficial to submit this information to the appropriate Wikipedia pages.
 4. Brochures and Backgrounder – Whether attending a meeting or visiting with policy makers, PATH members may not have much time to verbally communicate their messages. At these times, it is helpful to have something to leave behind, be it a brochure or a backgrounder that simply and quickly explains PATH’s core messages.

Other Opportunities

Media Training and Speaker’s Bureau

Knowing PATH’s audiences, messages, and communication vehicles is foundational to a communication strategy, but it is also important to have spokespeople who can clearly and simply communicate these messages.

A media training workshop would train PATH members on how to effectively communicate with the public, members of the media, and policy makers. Media-trained members are a powerful resource and can pen letters to the editor, be the source of an expert pitch, and field requests from reporters.