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Format: Campaign Profile-A two-page summary of a Silver-Anvil Award winner, addressing research, planning, execution and evaluation.

Title: PR Plan Creates "Winning Opinions"

Carl T. Hayden Veterans Affairs Medical Center, 2004, 2pgs

Summary: This entry is an example of a turnaround in the image of a Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Our goal: To improve the perception of the Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center as a quality medical facility among key publics. Key publics included employees, opinion leaders, and the community at large. Strategies included direct communication with key publics, media relations, and special events (particularly the Veterans Day parade event). Challenges included recent negative publicity regarding VA Medical Centers generally in the national press, which we feared had had a negative impact on our particular VA Medical Center. All objectives were achieved.

Full Text: OVERVIEW

This entry is an example of a turnaround in the image of a Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Our goal: To improve the perception of the Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center as a quality medical facility among key publics. Key publics included employees, opinion leaders, and the community at large. Strategies included direct communication with key publics, media relations, and special events (particularly the Veterans Day parade event). Challenges included recent negative publicity regarding VA Medical Centers generally in the national press, which we feared had had a negative impact on our particular VA Medical Center.

RESEARCH

In order to determine how different publics perceived us, we created several survey instruments. We identified our key publics as the general community (Attachment 1), our patients (Attachment 2), our employees (Attachment 3), our volunteers (Attachment 4), and our Veterans Service Officers (Attachment 5). We learned that our major image problem was with our own employees, only a third of whom said they were very proud to work here. Nearly half the employees thought we had morale problems. So the research reinforced what we thought: We had an image problem, and we needed to establish better working relationships with key publics, especially employees.

PLANNING

We knew our overall goal was to improve the perception of our VA as a quality medical facility, so we created a plan using that goal, developing key themes and messages, conducting a situation analysis, identifying our opportunities and barriers and our key publics—employees and volunteers, patients, the medical center community, the media, Congress and others. We outlined our activities by creating measurable objectives including a public, a level, an outcome, and a time frame. All of these items were rolled up into a Strategic Public Affairs Plan (Attachment 6) that was shared with management and staff. Fifteen objectives and nearly 70 tactics were created. The five primary objectives were: 1) Build VA's positive image in the community improving by at least 20 percent throughout the upcoming year; 2) Increase the percentage of employees who are very proud and somewhat proud to work at our VAMC by shifting opinions to the positive by 5 percent throughout the coming year; 3) Increase employee morale in the good to excellent category by shifting opinions to the positive by 5 percent throughout the upcoming year; 4) Work with the media to improve positive media coverage by 25 percent throughout the year; and 5) Increase the level of support by 10 percent from the external opinion leader group the Veterans Medical Leadership Council throughout the year. We were allocated \$125,000 (not including salaries) for a 12-month program.

EXECUTION

Objective 1:

To build VA's positive image in the community improving it by at least 20 percent throughout the upcoming year, we employed several different tactics. These included creating a cable access TV show called "To Your Health" that outlines ways the general public and veterans can get more from their physical exams, learning proper exercise techniques, etc. There are six shows designed to air once each month from January through June and then repeat from July through December. According to community polls, approximately 7 percent of Maricopa County residents watch To Your Health. We continued our VA Medical Center's Veterans Day Parade that is coordinated by Public Affairs and supported by a volunteer parade committee. More than 175,000 people attended (Attachment 7, parade program). We ensured our press kit was revamped and it now includes a four-color fact sheet plus eight inserts—Our History, Leadership and Values. What We Offer, Community Based Clinics. VA Is A Teaching Hospital, VA Research and Development, Media Guide, Speakers Bureau, Employer of Choice (Attachment 8). Nearly 2500 copies were presented to members of the media, community and congressional

members. Lastly, we continued to provide a four-page patient education newsletter called Health Trends to 60,000 patients each quarter. Public affairs is responsible for writing the front page article and we purchase copyrighted health care information from the publisher. From here the newsletter is designed and mailed to each of our 60,000 patient's homes (Attachment 9).

Objective 2:

To increase the percentage of employees who are very proud and somewhat proud to work at our VAMC by shifting opinions to the positive by 5 percent throughout the coming year, we enhanced a program created by public affairs in 2001 called the "Pride Campaign." This program allows employees, managers, and others to offer on-the-spot recognition to those who promote the VA in a positive light. Once they receive this award, they can go to the "gift shop" in HR to pick out a gift. Award items range from flashlights to briefcases (Attachment 10 and 11).

Objective 3:

Increase employee morale in the good to excellent category by shifting opinions to the positive by 5 percent throughout the upcoming year. To improve morale we created two new campaigns in the employee newsletter called the Desert Sun. The "Role Model Campaign" for employees highlights outstanding and steady employees by sharing their work ethics, philosophies, and goals in each issue. The "Leaving A Legacy" campaign highlights stellar employees who are close to retirement and shares their philosophies, work ethics, morals, and beliefs with others so that junior staff can emulate them (Attachment 12).

Objective 4:

Work with the media to improve positive media coverage by 25 percent throughout the year. We distributed 25 news releases ranging from special events, to medical advances, to visiting dignitaries, to services for veterans. Each release was distributed to 27 Print outlets, 17 radio outlets, and six television outlets in the Phoenix metropolitan area (Attachment 13).

Objective 5:

Increase the level of support by 10 percent from the external opinion leaders group (Veterans Medical Leadership Council). We continue to work with an external opinion leaders group called the Veterans Medical Leadership Council. Their role is to assist us in improving the image of the CTHVAMC in the community, provide support to enhance employee morale, and ensure there is adequate health care funding for veterans in Maricopa County. In 2003, they became a 501c19 organization and added a fund-raising element to their cause. The group is comprised of high profile opinion leaders in the community who are veterans. They meet bimonthly to provide advice and counsel to the VA Medical Center Director and PAO (Attachment 14).

EVALUATION

We achieved all objectives.

Objective 1: To build VA's positive image in the community improving it by at least 20 percent throughout the year. According to our Community Telephone Survey, the cable access TV show called "To Your Health" improved opinions from 36 percent in 2002 to 53 percent in 2003—a 17 percent improvement. The annual VA Medical Center's Veterans Day Parade improved the image of the hospital from 26 percent in 2002 to 30 percent in 2003, a 4 percent improvement. The revamped press kit reflects our unproved health care services, and requests for this tool have increased. The patient newsletter Health Trends improved opinion from 51.3 percent in 2001 to 69.5 percent in 2003 (no survey was conducted in 2002). This culminates to an improvement of 39.2 percent, which is 19.2 percent ABOVE the targeted objective (Attachment 15 Community Report).

Objective 2: To increase the percentage of employees who are very proud and somewhat proud to work at our VAMC by shifting opinions to the positive by 5 percent throughout the coming year. According to the electronic survey of employees who responded to the question about feelings of pride in 2002, 34.2 percent said they were very proud, and in 2003, 47.3 percent said they were very proud—an increase of 13.1 percent, which is 8.1 percent ABOVE the targeted objective (Attachment 16 VISTA Report on pride).

Objective 3: Increase employee morale in the good- to-excellent category by shifting opinions to the positive by 5 percent throughout the upcoming year. According to the electronic survey of employees who responded to the question about morale in the facility, 33.9 percent responded "well to excellent" in 2002, while 46 percent responded "good to excellent" in 2003—an increase of 12.1 percent, which is 7.1 percent ABOVE the targeted objective (Attachment 17 VISTA Report on morale).

Objective 4: Work with the media to improve positive media coverage by 25 percent throughout the year. In both years we sent out about 25 news releases for the year. (We count our parade media coverage separately since it is very extensive.) In 2002 we had 25 media hits, and in 2003 we had 99 media hits, nearly a four-fold increase, helping us to surpass our goal. The parade garnered 50 hits, similar to 2002 with about three million impressions for the parade (Attachment 18).

Objective 5: Increase the level of support by 10 percent from the external opinion leader's group (Veterans

Medical Leadership Council). In 2003 the council decided to host a fund-raising lunch to help support VA and its veterans. This meant adding six additional meetings for the event—a 100 percent increase in support (Attachment 19). Their fund-raising efforts more than doubled, netting nearly \$85,000 in donations. This group was highlighted in the November 2003 PRSA's Tactics (Attachment 20).