

BULLETIN

## The third thing

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HSA PRESIDENT REID JOHNSON ON EFFORTS TO RAISE PROFILE FOR HEALTH SCIENCE PROFESSIONALS WORKING ALONGSIDE DOCTORS AND NURSES

**The Report:** *HSA is launching two ad campaigns in September. Tell us about them.*

**Reid Johnson:** Every year we place print ads in papers around the province promoting our involvement in Run for the Cure, and this year we've hired a new ad agency to freshen up our thinking. They've come up with a new look that gives profile to some of the professions involved in the breast cancer journey while reinforcing our position as the union delivering modern health care. The ads will run in print and on line, and I think both members and the public are going to like them.

The second campaign will build on the TV ads we launched last fall. We're going to run that ad again, and we've hired the same ad agency to come up with a companion piece that will help the public understand a little more about who we are and how our different professions work together to create harmony in the health care system. It's a very unique spot and I think it will be effective, especially when placed alongside the very popular ad we ran last fall.

Both ad campaigns are part of a larger plan. Last year the Board decided that we needed to change our approach to advertising and embark on a longer-term program to raise awareness of HSA, not just a one-off ad campaign. We're investing in higher-cost but more highly visible vehicles like TV ads, but we're also thinking hard about how we tell the public who we are, how we differ from other unions and other members of the health care team, and why we matter.

**TR:** *Do the ads deal specifically with our upcoming round of bargaining?*

**RJ:** No, they do not, and there is a very deliberate strategy here.

Over the last few years we've done quite a lot of research among members of the public, the media and HSA itself and we've found that HSA and the health science professionals we represent have very little visibility. When asked about the health care system, people talk about doctors and nurses right off the top. Then, after a little bit of thought, they start to describe this "third thing" ... a group of professionals like pharmacists, physiotherapists, dietitians, medical laboratory technologists and so forth. The public doesn't know what to call this group of people, but they know we are there because everyone has had some contact with us, or knows someone who has.

Now, the high profile of the doctors and nurses shouldn't be too surprising. Doctors and nurses have been iconic figures in the popular imagination for the last 100 years or longer, and health science professionals are quite diverse and have generally been relatively recent or highly specialized additions to the health care team. So the problem we were finding is that when we spend members' money on ads delivering a very specific message about bargaining or problems in the health care system, people were confused because they didn't know who we were. The public couldn't hear the HSA's message because they didn't know what to make of the

messenger.

We need to change that, but its not a quick fix. Doctors and nurses have a big head start on us. But we feel that a multi-year series of ads which explain who we are and how we fit into the health care system will pay off. By trying to build higher profile, well ultimately bring more clout at the bargaining table and be able to deliver more specific messages in campaigns down the line.

This is happening on more than the one level. In addition to the new positioning and ad campaigns, weve begun engaging in more aggressive government relations to ensure key decision makers know more about us. Were also taking a look at ways to rethink our media relations.

**TR:** *Is that why the new ad, like last years TV ad, shows a very positive vision of the health care system?*

**RJ:** We dont shy away from being blunt about the problems of our health care system. We speak out every day to make sure the media and the public know that public health care has problems that need action, right now. But were also concerned that by focusing only on the negative aspects of our health care system we may be partially responsible for public cynicism about it. Weve found that Canadians are very conflicted about health care. On the one hand, they are incredibly proud of public health care and see it as fundamental to their identity. But on the other hand they read every day about declining conditions and theyve grown pessimistic about the future of public health care.

Our members believe strongly in a public health care system that has a bright future, partly because of the innovation our members bring to it, and we wanted to make that a big part of these ads.

**TR:** *Tell us about how we selected the new tagline: -the union delivering modern health care".*

**RJ:** The new tagline is the culmination of work the union has been doing for years. Our large and diverse membership has always required us to try to come up with creative ways to make our identity simple and memorable to the public and the media. Recently, we worked with some industry professionals who specialize in branding, marketing, media and public relations. In that process we recognized there are some fundamental ways our union and our membership stands out from others. We are highly-trained, highly-specialized and highly dedicated to our patients and clients. We are the people who bring the new tools and techniques to the health care system. And our diversity means that we are everywhere in the health care system ... the glue that holds it together.

Wrapping that all together, the HSA and the health science professionals we serve are the people who bring the -modern" to the modern health care system. Without us, doctors and nurses would still be using the same tools theyve been using for a century.

**TR:** *The new positioning puts a lot of emphasis on health care. How does this benefit members in the community social services?*

**RJ:** We believe it does benefit all our members, but of course we had to make some tough choices. We always have; with over 75 different professions weve traditionally mentioned or portrayed only a handful in our ads over the years. We consulted widely during the development of these ideas and there was widespread recognition that we had to carve things down to something simple, that it had to represent the majority of our members, and that ultimately all members benefit from the increase in profile and clout that results. 

#### HSA ads win more awards

The Canadian Association of Labour Media recognized HSA public advertising with a number of awards this year. Awards were given for best public advocacy on line video, best commercial radio ad and best website design. HSAs work has already been recognized with an outstanding achievement award from Interactive Media, juried by an international range of judges from companies including American Express and Microsoft, and a 2010 award by Clio, one of the worlds most recognized global awards competitions for advertising, design, interactive and public relations.

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