

A report from Point to Point

WILL A REVERSAL OF FORTUNE MEAN A REVERSAL OF ROLES?

Why Men May Soon Deserve More of Your Marketing Attention

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It's widely recognized that women are the primary healthcare decision-makers and influencers. In addition to their own healthcare choices, they often make – or at least strongly influence – decisions for their spouses, children and parents. It stands to reason that given their decision-making clout, healthcare marketers have increasingly focused much of their outreach, services and advertising toward these influential women.

But times are changing for our favorite target audience. Women now make up 58% of college graduates and earn an even higher percentage of post-graduate degrees. And now, for the first time in U.S. history, women may surpass men in the workforce. According to a February 5, 2009 New York Times article (“As Layoffs Surge, Women May Pass Men in Job Force”), 82% of the layoffs over the past 12 months have affected men. The result is that more women are assuming the role of primary earner or in many cases, the sole earner, for their families.

Until now women have controlled over 80% of household spending, including spending on healthcare. But with more demands on their time, changes will have to be made. What will families do to accommodate the wife and mother's new role? Should healthcare strategists and marketers begin envisioning a future in which men and fathers increasingly start to make more healthcare-related decisions for their families? Will men begin to take on the role of “house husband” and start to manage the health, nutrition and healthcare of their families? Or will women continue to take on more without delegating their traditional responsibilities for managing the family's health?

**PUTTING YOUR
FINGER ON
THE PULSE OF
FAMILIES IN
YOUR AREA**

While it's still too early to know possible long-term results from the changing job landscape, it's a marketer's job to identify market changes. There are two ways you can begin determining if a trend toward greater male involvement in healthcare engagement and spending is emerging in your market:

1. CHECK INTERNAL USAGE. Ask clinicians, physicians and staff if they're noting an increase in the number of men engaging with your system. You might specifically ask:

- Are men calling your referring physicians' offices more frequently regarding symptoms, billing, or prescription drug concerns regarding other family members?
- Are they showing up more often in doctor's offices to bring children or parents in for appointments?
- Are you seeing more men come out to patient education seminars and outreach events?

2. UNDERTAKE SOME INITIAL MARKET RESEARCH.

Basic secondary research will tell you if women are making up a greater percentage, and men are making up a corresponding declining percentage, of your region's labor force. If secondary research does bear out a possible trend, you'll want to consider undertaking some primary qualitative research to understand how gender roles related to healthcare spending are being affected by the economy and job market in your area.

After confirming that roles related to healthcare spending and engagement are changing for families in your area, you can begin considering relevant new marketing initiatives. There are several relatively inexpensive ways you could help fathers in their new role, while at the same time positioning your system as their trusted advisor and preferred service provider. For example you could:

- Suggest ways that they could more easily determine when an office visit is warranted for their child versus waiting it out at home, or when urgent care, or an ED visit is required.
- Make your system available for questions by phone or email. Make it easy and non-threatening for dads to approach your staff with questions.
- Post the answers to FAQs on your site so that men and dads who are new to this role can easily access information without feeling intimidated by asking.

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- Create and post simple online videos or PowerPoint slide presentations about your healthcare system, as well as common pediatric medical conditions, symptoms and treatments on sites like YouTube or SlideShare that dads can view in the comfort of their own home.
- Provide pre-appointment questionnaires. Create office-based literature and online material that a dad could use to gather important information before taking a sick child in for an appointment (i.e. when did symptoms begin, how high was the fever, any allergies to medications, have appetite and sleep patterns changed, etc.).
- Offer dad a copy of their child's vaccine history and let him know when the next one is needed or, better yet, schedule the appointment at check-out and send an electronic reminder to both the mother and father's email addresses.

The disproportionate marketing focus on women as healthcare purchasers may, sooner rather than later, need to be re-evaluated. As Ame Wadler, chief strategic officer for public relations firm Burson-Marsteller noted, "Marketers who are able to help Dad find his voice again will win big."

IN THE MEANTIME...

Whether men take on more healthcare-related responsibilities or not, it's clear that women are taking on greater responsibility to provide financially for their families. It's a safe assumption that to do so and maintain an appropriate focus on their family's healthcare needs, they will need additional support from their healthcare service providers. Yet they're not finding that support today.

A Harris Interactive poll for the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) found that nearly 60% of women surveyed had difficulty obtaining consistent, coordinated care from their providers. Consider ways that your system could make selecting and using your healthcare services easier for working women as they struggle with the increasingly stressful job of balancing work, family and finances. For example, your system could:

- Identify the most prevalent single-episode and chronic medical conditions facing working women in your community and bundle services under one service line or area within your hospital so that women can do "one-stop shopping" to get screenings, preventive treatment, medical consults, etc. and minimize their time spent seeking care.

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- Identify local businesses and organizations that employ a high number of female workers and approach them about offering periodic recommended screenings, flu shots, services and educational seminars onsite.
- Let women know in advance if their doctors' office is running behind schedule so patients can miss less work time rather than wait longer in the waiting room. Consider posting ED wait times online so patients can determine the best course of action for their immediate needs.
- Extend lab or office hours on certain days so women can meet their family's healthcare needs without losing valuable work time.
- Implement an email offering, allowing women to request appointments, request prescription refills, or ask questions about symptoms, treatments and billing so they can interact with your system at times that are more convenient for them.
- Create partnerships with local retail health clinics in your market in order to better serve the female head of household.

STEP ONE

So what can you do today? First recognize that change is happening. Families are facing greater pressure on their time and their budgets than ever before. The job landscape is changing. Those forces are creating new challenges for patients and consumers in your area. Invest the time and resources necessary to understand how your market could be directly affected by those changes both now and in the near future. Determine whether men in your market are beginning to get more directly involved in their family's healthcare choices. Or whether women are simply taking on more.

Then review your current approach to marketing and customer service and support. Consider what your system can do to help this changing healthcare consumer make better decisions. If you're the first one to acknowledge and address their changing needs, they'll remember it when they're choosing healthcare for their family in the future.

P O I N T O P O I N T

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