



Strategic California Patient Education Program Moves Public Opinion, Supports New Legislation

Situation

Gable PR was retained by the California Patient Education Program (Patient Program) to provide strategic counsel on media and public affairs initiatives for a program to educate the media and community leaders in Southern California about three major issues: the costly suffering from undiagnosed fibromyalgia, a disease affecting 6 million Americans but one criticized as not being a real disease by some media; the threat of increased health care costs from proposed legislation to require electronic pedigree (e-pedigree) devices to track every bottle of medicine sold by prescription in the state of California as a means of combating counterfeiting; and potential harm to patients from cost-based switching, where insurance companies would force physicians to switch prescriptions from drugs that may be working to drugs that simply cost less, without consideration for the patient.

The issues needed a high level of awareness so sponsors of e-pedigree legislation in the state would have support to modify the bills to remove unintended consequence for patients. Physicians, insurance companies, pharmacies, patients and the undiagnosed needed to learn more about new treatments being made available for fibromyalgia.

The Plan

Gable PR created a multi-faceted strategic campaign that included a steady stream of stories on the need to pass new e-pedigree legislation, avoid cost-based switching and support fibromyalgia education. The agency planned a series of timely and compelling opinion editorial pieces by patients, doctors and other various experts; and facts versus myths features to counter the false claims about fibromyalgia. The grass roots campaign focused on patient health, potential increased costs to the health care system in California and potential issues with patient treatments. The agency drove media coverage from small community newspapers throughout Southern California to major dailies, weeklies and network television stations. The concept was to educate local media and then drive coverage to make patients, physicians, patient advocacy organizations, business organizations and elected officials aware of the issues and the potential consequences of approving proposed legislation that had failed to consider many cost and compliance issues.



The Results

The agency tracked all media and saw both an increase in coverage of the issues and a shift to more balanced reporting by the end of six months, with widespread media support by the end of the program. Gable PR secured more than 5.5 million media impressions, making patients throughout California more aware of fibromyalgia symptoms and raising awareness of issues with cost-based switching. New legislation was passed that extended the timeline for enacting the e-pedigree system in California and eliminated costly and inefficient requirements for tracking drugs that would never be counterfeited or went through highly controlled distribution channels.

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