

# Ethical marketing in private practice

Tingy Simoes, who looks after BAAPs examines how cosmetic surgery can be marketed in an ethical way

Public relations, ironically, has a PR problem. Although there is an increased acceptance of this marketing approach in the healthcare arena, and a growing demand for it, there is still an element of resistance, even distaste, among individual consultants in terms of engaging (or admitting to engaging) a publicist.

There is a misconception that, to promote their practice, clinicians are going to have to compromise their own values, principles and dignity to 'whore themselves out' to the media.

They see only a dire, shameful road before them: commenting on bad celeb surgery from morning chat show couches or performing 'makeovers' to competition winners.

They fear not only the jeers of august colleagues but - justifiably - the endangering of hard-earned reputations. So in the big, bad world of business: is there room for promoting your services via anything other than a basic website? The answer is there are ways of marketing medical products or services without selling one's soul.

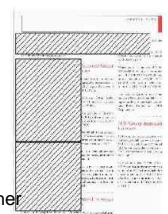
Over the last decade I have identified three main elements; a

'Holy Trinity of PR' if you like; which if used individually or to best effect alongside each other they will allow you to secure press coverage in an entirely ethical manner. It doesn't entail slagging anyone else's work or puffing yourself up as a pioneer of anything (unless you are one, of course!).

The first item (or box to tick!) in healthcare PR is the 'Science'. This entails highlighting or explaining a procedure, technique, product or technology - the only way you, a clinician, can.

Ideally it will be new, or perhaps a twist on an established approach. I can already hear the eye-rolling: but an element of novelty is important. There's a reason they're called NEWSpapers! Ensure that your 'story' illuminates readers or viewers as to what it is you're performing or offering.

The next piece of the puzzle is 'Numbers': by this I mean studies and statistics. This could be a thorough clinical trial care-



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fully conducted over years and published in a peer-reviewed journal...or it could be a fun lifestyle poll on 'the most highly sought-after buttock shape'.

You could identify perhaps a trend; are you seeing younger or older people in your practice? More men? More teachers, or stressed-out bankers? Most importantly this is all data that is available at your fingertips - and it's free!

The final, most important aspect of crafting a PR story is also admittedly the hardest: 'People'. By people we mean human interest, i.e., first-person accounts. Otherwise, it's just a doctor saying how great their work is. Your patients are your best ambassadors - they can communicate with the public directly, about their feelings and experience of being under your care. Granted, patients willing to show their bingo wings or discuss their gastric problems in the Mail on Sunday are few and far between.

But if you don't ask them, you won't know. And those who are happy to share their story are worth their weight (-loss sur-

gery?) in gold. Judging by the outrageous media requests I regularly receive, for ever-more unusual and sensationalist trends and procedures, you would be pardoned for thinking that the only patient stories journalists are interested are the ones hinging on the absurd.

Yet sometimes what sells it is not the unusual procedure ('science'); it could be a perfectly run-of-the-mill treatment. However, if the emotional impact ('people') it had is dramatic enough, then the material will be considered valid.

Your work, your stories, deserve to be told. Share them with the public, grow your practice, and remain true to your ethics. It is possible.

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