Hospital Impact

| FierceHealthcare | FierceHealthIT | FierceMobileHealthcare | FierceHealthPayer |
| FierceHealthFinance | FierceEMR | FiercePracticeManagement | **Hospital Impact** |

Big data and storytelling: The necessary duo in healthcare

October 22nd, 2015

by Andrea J. Simon

On Oct. 10 at the Society for Healthcare Strategy and Market Development (SHSMD) conference in the District of Columbia, I presented a workshop with Mark Clark, Healthgrades vice president of strategic development, called: "Your Data Wants To Talk--How Can You Hear It?"

Impressively, the entire conference was focused on this topic, paralleling SHSMD's recent report, "Bridging Worlds, The Future Role of the Healthcare Strategist." For this blog, I thought I would begin a discussion on the intersection of data and storytelling, as more and more hospital marketers grapple with how to turn an abundance of data into smarter marketing strategies.

Healthcare providers now realize they cannot continue to market patient-centric, high quality care as their brand

This is no longer enough to stay competitive. To survive, these decision-makers recognize that somehow, they are going to have to make their organizations' customer experience different from other healthcare institutions' and relevant to consumers. How to do this? Big data combined with crucial insights into consumer behavior.

[More:]

Two significant forces at work, at odds with one another and yet inextricably interconnected

First is the abundance of big data and the challenge to make it valuable. Second is the need to convert this data and the emerging insights that come from it into more relevant storytelling that captures customers and patients. This "capturing" needs to take place across all forms of media: traditional, social media, personal experiences and 1:1 engagements.

When I talk about "storytelling" here, I don't mean just any old stories. To be relevant, they must move mind-share and engage people so that they become believers in your solutions, not those of others. Also, the stories should build on experiences so that your "new healthcare models" come alive and deliver on the consumer's expectations. And finally, the stories need to mean something to the consumer, not be all about you.
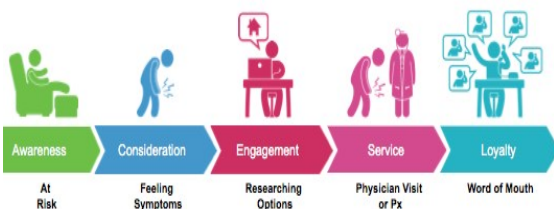
What can big data tell us about a healthcare user's journey?

It doesn't matter if it's someone with heart disease or a person seeking bariatric surgery, there is clearly a need to move beyond the point in time when a patient meets with a doctor or healthcare provider to get care. There is the "prequel" moment, sometimes years before the person gets to that encounter, and the "sequel" that continues long afterward. In the process, those healthcare providers become part of a person's bigger story.

For example, for people who have had a recent heart attack, their buyer's journey story in the data might look like this:

Heart Attacks 37,815 Individuals	
Time Between Last Visit to Heart Attack	
Time Frame	**Individuals**
1-3 Days	1,324
4-7 Days	1,022
8-14 Days	1,029
15-21 Days	792
22-30 Days	789
31-60 Days	1,697
61-90 Days	1,186
91 - 120 Days	903
121 Days - 365 Days	3,731
AVG	**90 Days**
MEDIAN	**50 Days**

1) Their visits to their doctors increased for a period of time before their attack.

2) Patients who had heart attacks had been to the doctor, on average, between 1-3 months before their attack. As we thought about this we wondered where in the story those doctors were working to prevent that heart attack with that patient?

3) For healthcare providers, this was both an interesting data point and a potentially important insight. But it was perplexing. How could they use this data? What does it mean for their treatment of a patient? What are they missing as they tell their own stories about why that patient ended up with a heart attack?

4) Moreover, the data is hidden in an abundance of places. If you look at a patients' journey map, you can imagine how they might move through life until they have encounters with physicians or healthcare systems.

Awareness	Consideration	Engagement	Service	Loyalty
At Risk	Feeling Symptoms	Researching Options	Physician Visit or Px	Word of Mouth

What is the "real" story in the data?

As a result, while we search data to understand a population's or a person's healthcare journey, there is something else happening here--a person's own story that gives that journey meaning.

People are always searching for the "truth." There are different stories in the data. What we need to better understand is what these stories mean to the people who are living them. And, then how to use that meaning to help healthcare providers deliver better care to prevent those heart attacks and keep people living active and healthy lives.

As we learn more about the power of big data, we are expanding our understanding of people's experiences before, during and after they are engaged with our healthcare system. Now it is time for our healthcare systems to begin to realize that they play a valuable role in the lives of these people. The stories that emerge from these engagements become part of people's life stories and those of the healthcare systems that they embrace.

Andrea J. Simon, Ph.D., is a former marketing, branding and culture change senior vice president at Hurley Medical Center in Flint, Michigan. She also is president and CEO of Simon Associates Management Consultants.