

Positive PR Wins Approval for HCA's Healthcare Expansion Plans

Overview

Public relations campaigns were sought to support HCA's Southeast Division, which included a healthcare network of 25 hospitals and surgery centers in Georgia and the Carolinas with more than \$1.5 billion in annual revenue. Programs were needed to support major issues affecting HCA's expansion efforts to serve growing populations and positively position HCA's local facility brands. HCA wanted to clarify misperceptions and misunderstandings regarding issues surrounding healthcare access/choice and for-profit versus not-for-profit entities.

Objectives

The agency's charge was twofold and encompassed issues management and media relations. Cookerly helped educate key constituencies about major healthcare issues including healthcare access/ choice, contracts with insurance providers, Certificates of Need (CON), workforce shortages, patient safety, and emergency preparedness. On the media relations front, the agency assisted local hospitals with bolstering their brands and increasing visibility in their communities.

Strategy & Tactics

The agency developed strategic programs and key messages on major issues for hospital CEOs to deliver a consistent HCA viewpoint.

One typical initiative involved assisting Macon's Coliseum Medical Center with a campaign to garner widespread support for its open-heart surgery program opened in May 2001 while awaiting further court action. This diverse effort included strategic input on advertorials, radio messages, letters-to-the-editor and community leaders, employee communications and additional grass roots efforts.

Additionally, the agency provided support surrounding insurance contract negotiations by developing comprehensive communications materials to promote consistent, clear communications with target audiences.

Results

Issues Management: Public relations campaigns contributed to successfully obtaining CONs for Johns Creek Hospital in Duluth and Newnan (subsequently was not built); agreement from the state court of appeals to hear the Macon open-heart surgery case; inclusion of HCA facilities in state employees' healthcare contract.

HCA



Highlights

Cookerly helped HCA secure Certificates of Need

Agency positioned HCA experts as resources for state and national media

Enhanced internal communication by establishing division-wide marketing manager conferences.

Media Relations: The agency positioned HCA top management as media experts with key healthcare/business reporters, established relationships with the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *Atlanta Business Chronicle* and *The Wall Street Journal* and facilitated interviews around the state with hospital spokespeople and local media. Coverage was obtained for hospitals in local and national publications on such topics as emergency preparedness following September 11th; sleep centers, pediatric programs and more.

Internal Communications: Internal communication among hospitals was enhanced by instituting division-wide marketing manager conferences to review issues and share best practices. Previously, there had been no formalized division-wide communication.