



PRSA Chicago May Career Contributions Winner

Carlin Twedt, Marketing and Social Media Coordinator at Ragan Communications ([@Carl In Tweets](#))

Carlin manages social media marketing for 80+ events benefiting PR, marketing and communications professionals around the country. He promotes blog content on four Ragan web properties, Ragan Communications, PR Daily, Health Care Communications and HR Communications, to which he is also a contributor. Follow him at [@Carl In Tweets](#).

The Changing Face of Healthcare in PR

PRSA's 'Changing Face of Healthcare Communications' May luncheon played host to a packed room of communicators and an expert panel consisting of: Jim Cohn, Director of External Communications at Walgreens; Meg Dempsey, Director of Marketing and Communications at the American Academy of Periodontology; Rohan Hutchings, Communications Director at Aetna; Jeff Winton, CCO and SVP of Corporate Affairs at Astella; and Moderator Ovidio Torres, Partner, Health at Finn Partners. Each of the panelists had a different reason for working in healthcare, but they had in common a deeply personal inspiration for their career paths.

Healthcare today deals with overwhelming challenges involving new media trends, bad press and public misunderstanding. Some can be explained by rifts between what stories get press -- Zika, Planned Parenthood -- and intricate issues like Obamacare, which more dramatically affect patients and health professionals. Other issues, such as the astronomical price of good health, can be attributed to bad apples such as Turing Pharmaceuticals and a lack of public understanding about the incredible cost of healthcare operations. For example, Jeff mentioned that 95% of drugs fail, creating pressure on the 5% of successful drugs to generate revenue.

How patients consume information is shifting as quickly as the industry itself. Internal communications teams at large companies are increasingly gaining importance in overall communications strategies. PR teams are creating digital newsrooms, hosted on organizations' websites, where the press or the public can find news about the company through a search engine. With so much information available to patients, doctors must increasingly market themselves as experts in their field: Where a doctor's opinion used to be final, patients, especially millennials, question their opinion or can look on WebMD for answers. Doctors rely less on drug reps to learn about new medicines and increasingly look to social media.

Agencies play an important role in healthcare PR. Not only do they bring an outside perspective on what health communications must be, they have an understanding of modern PR that extends to diverse industries. Jeff described agencies as "futurists"; Meg appreciated the fact that agencies drive her team out of their comfort zone.

The panel agreed strongly that the patient must be at the center of health communications. This can be a significant challenge, as patients change healthcare providers and plans once every three years on average, and are largely responsible for making sure that their continuity of care across physicians and insurance providers.

To maintain a patient-centric communications approach, health PR pros must accomplish three things: resist the "he-said, she-said" finger-pointing between insurance providers, drug manufacturers, and

healthcare organizations; stay current on healthcare trends; and stop speaking in the abstract, with terms such as “improving outcomes and satisfaction.”

Most frustrating of these clichés is the “evolving landscape” descriptor, for which we’ll provide a few alternatives in closing:

- Tectonic shift
- Moving goalposts
- Changing rule book
- Sea change
- Tidal shift