



Health Claims: Unity and the Design Process

by *Risa Schulman, Ph.D.*

In the first installment of this series, Health Claims: Science and Science-ability, we introduced the idea that substantiating health claims is an evolving competency within companies that takes a combination of scientific research acumen, regulatory expertise and marketing savvy, and that even when all of these talents can get together in a room, the outcome can often leave questions as to whether the claims are the strongest and most comprehensive they can be. The ultimate goal is to take good science and to Use it Well, meaning the resulting claim hits the three key elements of being scientifically accurate, legally compliant and compelling. Finally, we discussed a tool: Writing it Down. This installment expands on these ideas and adds a new concept: Unity.

Writing down the substantiation behind health claims has a number of benefits that ultimately result in creating a strong foundation for all aspects of product development and launch. Researching, analyzing and describing the science in an organized, easily comprehensible document puts the raw materials at your fingertips. The data can be synthesized according to its merit and “claim-worthiness.” An individual or team skilled in science and regulations that knows the industry well can fairly pick out the claims and be clear about the strength of the substantiation behind them.

From there, these raw claims can be presented to the entire team working on the product. Given the many complexities of the industry and health claims in particular, this step is what separates those who Use it Well and those who don't. The purpose of the meeting is to include the insight and needs of each of the departments working on the product into the design of the claims and their role in the product story. Roughly, the team should consist of a representative from the science (scientific affairs, R&D, product development—whichever applies), regulatory, marketing, sales, legal and public relations teams, although it will vary by company. An introduction to the science itself by an inspiring team member can bring on board the non-scientists and get their juices flowing. These meetings can be tough: frustrating, contentious and loooong ... but they can also be dynamic brainstorming sessions that generate a clever and creative middle ground that allows the value of the product to

shine through while considering important interests and limitations.

This is the gold. Because from there the departments working on the product create Unity. The alternative: a company gets back a list of approved claims from legal's review of the science, combined with a heavy dose of regulatory consideration, only to have marketing belly-ache that they can't sell the product with that language and massage out their own claims copy based on a limited understanding of the science and regulatory, which is different from how PR interpreted it and created messaging points for the press releases in a way they think will appeal to the consumer ... etc., etc. Not only can that create an inadvertent regulatory minefield and inaccurate communication of the health benefit, but it also results in an overall message that is not unified across the board. The soul of the real value of the product has not been captured.

When the final claims language is devised by consensus and is written down in a summarizing document, it is in a form that everyone can use and it has buy-in. This Unity creates confidence in the message, which translates into strong component pieces that get developed in each department. Doing this early in the product development process creates fertile ground for creativity and strength in designing all aspects of the product launch.

Check back next month to find out how to design the write-up to make it a valuable, multi-purpose internal—and even external—resource for the whole company. □

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