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## CONSUMER DIRECTED HEALTHCARE - A NEW TREND

Gone are the days when the maxim that ruled the healthcare industry was "Build it and they will come", under the impression that that if people knew where services were located they would find their way to the clinics.

In post liberalisation India the healthcare industry is waking up to the fact that the consumer has to be pursued and enticed into visiting healthcare facilities of a particular brand and to buy healthcare products of a particular brand. With the government permitting 100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI) in the health care industry, there is a deluge of private players in the Indian Healthcare market today. And this has dramatically changed the facade of healthcare marketing and communications in India.

Taking the case of hospitals, there is a wide variety of services (that are not just medical) on offer for the patient. From in-house multi cuisine restaurants, swimming pools, walking tracks, indoor games facilities, libraries and play areas to travel desks that arrange sightseeing tours and shopping for patients, you name it and they have it, all in a bid to woo more and more patients. Hospital promotions take on the form of Public Relations, VIP and visitor hospital tours and walk in exhibitions, loyalty and outreach programmes, support groups etc.

Similarly the pharmaceutical industry is going overboard in its attempts to appease the two routes that they have to reach out to the end consumers- doctors and pharmacists. For retailers it is boom time as they get free supplies of medicines, expensive gifts, holiday trips and also huge margins for promoting and selling particular brands at their outlets. With doctors the gifts, incentives and schemes are getting wilder by the day. The trend is to customise the gift to the doctor so that the pharmaceutical company actually meets a relevant need of the doctor rather than flooding him with things that he throws away or hands over to others. Taking examples of customised gifts it could be admission of a doctor's child to a reputed school or even the reimbursement of shopping bills. All in an attempt to get a better hold on this indirect consumer. For over the counter drugs there are advertisements in all shapes and sizes visible just anywhere. With sponsoring TV programmes to conducting mass consumer contact programmes to free sampling, pharmaceutical companies are trying innovative marketing ideas to get a share of the consumer's wallet.

One look at the statistics and the reason behind this intense competition gets clear. According to a Confederation of Indian Industry — McKinsey study on India's health industry, the country's spending on health care is expected to increase from Rs 86,000 crore at present to Rs 200,000 crore in the next decade. Health care's contribution to India's GDP will increase from the current 5.2 per cent to 8.5 per cent by 2012. The players in the healthcare industry fully realise that these predictions will come true with harnessing the burgeoning purchasing power of the Indian consumer.

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