

# Healthcare marketing: a double-edged sword

WELLNESS FEATURE



**Dr Richa Singh of Perfect Bounce raises some pertinent questions**

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In a consumerist world, marketing is a given. The more you market something the more it will catch the consumer's attention, and the more it will sell. Right?

But when it comes to healthcare, is marketing acceptable? If health is a basic need of everyone is it even ethical? Should healthcare professionals and doctors have to market themselves and their services in order to get more patients? Or is this type of marketing an unnecessary burden on the healthcare segment?

**Dr Richa Singh**, the dynamic Bangalore-based physiotherapy exponent calls for a look at the pros and cons of marketing healthcare.

On the plus side, there is the most obvious rationale for marketing healthcare as any other product or service – and that is the immediate advantage of letting more people know about the services you provide. So more dissemination of information directly leads to more prospective customers who can benefit from the healthcare services and products you are promoting, which leads to more people getting cured (who may have otherwise suffered in silence or worse, been subject to substandard cures which could potentially worsen their condition, or doom them to an existence of less than normal lifestyle, simply because they were not aware of the better alternatives).

So one can conclude that creating awareness of newer healthcare products, services and treatments

through active promotion can potentially lead to a healthier society over time.

On the other hand, the negatives of marketing healthcare are again the rather obvious impact of any promotion – the cost attached to any marketing or promotional activity which will invariably have to be passed on to the patient, thereby becoming an added burden on the patient in the form of increased cost of treatment that he ends up paying.

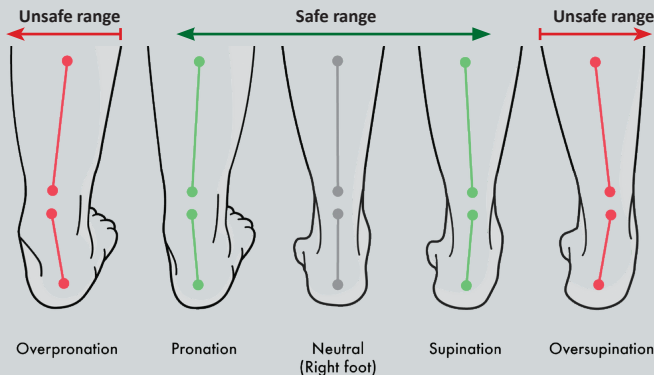
For example, a patient with a constant backpain can choose to go to a local healthcare professional be it a medical doctor or a physiotherapist or an alternative healer in his neighbourhood that he knows of through word of mouth. He is checked and prescribed a course of medicines or therapy or a mix of both, at X cost.

Now let's say the same neighbourhood healthcare outfit decides to aggressively market and promote its services in order to draw in more patients, create awareness and popularise the place. Promotional material is created in the form of advertising collateral, marketing activities are undertaken, people recruited on the field to create and disseminate information across various media like print, digital, online and so on. All of which needs marketing professionals who provide their services at some cost to the healthcare outfit.

Now the same patient with the chronic backpain ends up paying X plus marketing cost for the very same treatment.

Another factor to consider is all the extra time, effort, energy and monetary costs that marketing burdens the healthcare professionals with, when they could be utilising the same time and energy resources to treat more number of patients.

The conclusion is from the horse's mouth – Dr Richa Singh of Perfect Bounce with all her years of experience – marketing in the healthcare segment is a double-edged sword. It cuts both ways.



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