

## Modern Healthcare

# Health systems leverage marketing to get patients back through the door

Maria Castellucci



Healthcare systems across the country are creating marketing campaigns to let patients know that they're open for routine care and postponed appointments, and it's safe for them to come back.

Even as Los Angeles health systems face surging COVID-19 cases this summer, they have a consistent message to the community: Don't delay routine or emergent medical care.

The city's six major health systems launched a campaign in early May—before Los Angeles became a COVID-19 hot spot again—letting the community know their doors are open and urging patients to keep up with their health during the pandemic. The systems—Cedars-Sinai, Dignity Health, Kaiser Permanente, Keck Medicine of USC, Providence and UCLA Health—are usually fierce competitors that don't collaborate, but lower patient volumes had them all worried. Anecdotes from those on the front lines were consistent: Patients are avoiding needed healthcare services because they don't want to enter a setting where coronavirus lurks. Patients also didn't want to overwhelm the system with non-COVID-19 concerns.

“The second health crisis is people not getting care,” said Tanya Andreadis, chief marketing officer of UCLA Health.

The systems are still going full speed ahead on the marketing campaign even as L.A. sees a resurgence of COVID-19 cases, which caused the mayor to recently reinstate restrictions like the closure of bars and restaurants for dining.

“The messaging (of the campaign) is as important, or even more important, than ever before. While Los Angeles County experiences a spike in cases, the issue of putting your health first is critical to slowing the number of cases,” said Rhoda Weiss, a healthcare marketing consultant who is leading the campaign.

The systems dedicated their existing marketing assets—including billboards and advertising slots for print, TV and radio—to the campaign, which is called Better Together Health. The current assets run to the end of July, but the systems are working on how to continue the message even afterward, Weiss said. A main slogan is, “Life may be on pause. Your health isn’t.”

Weiss said she couldn’t offer cost figures on the campaign because the systems offered existing resources.

“We are saying, ‘We are here to take care of you,’ ” Weiss said.

The L.A. health systems aren’t unique in their marketing efforts. Similar messaging is being deployed by health systems across the country as they see 2020 revenue plummet because of the pandemic. A recent American Hospital Association [report](#) estimated hospitals lost \$200 billion between March and June, most of which was from canceled surgeries and lower volumes in outpatient clinics and emergency departments.

Given the strained finances, marketing departments are creating campaigns focused on encouraging patients to seek care, attempting to convince a scared public that a clinic and hospital isn’t a hotbed for the coronavirus. While marketing researchers say there are tactics health systems can deploy to convince many patients to schedule services, there may be a limit to how much of the volume providers can get back as long as there is no COVID-19 vaccine.