

Heads-Up Campaign Promotes Injury Prevention

BY RHODA WEISS

"When I finally got my license, I swore I'd never walk anywhere again. After the crash, the doctors told me I was right."

"Three seconds from now his hands will touch the water. Four seconds from now his head will hit the bottom. Two years from now he will have relearned enough words to tell you how it felt."

Got your attention? These messages are getting the attention of thousands of Mississippians as part of an injury-prevention program called "Heads Up!" developed by Mississippi Methodist Rehabilitation Center (MMRC) in Jackson.

REACHING THOSE AT RISK

The program targets those most at risk for brain and spinal cord injury (15- to 24-year-olds) and those who influence this age group, namely parents and teachers. Heads Up! doubles as an image and awareness effort and an educational community service program for the 124-bed physical rehabilitation center, which treats spinal cord injury, traumatic brain injury, arthritis, stroke, and other debilitating injuries and illnesses.

"Many of the injuries we see are preventable," says Isabelle White, vice president, marketing and public relations. "As part of our mission, we have a responsibility to help educate people with such basic safety messages as, 'Don't drink and drive,' 'Wear helmets,' and 'Check the water before diving.'"

These messages are delivered through a variety of media, including print advertisements, posters, an educational brochure and video, T-shirts, and seminars. The promotional material uses arresting headlines and stop-action images.

"We wanted to capture the moment of terror, the real horror that you might actually live this," says Vidal Blankenstein Clement, art director at Maris, West & Baker, Inc., in Jackson. "We're trying to communicate the realization that you



Ms. Weiss is a Santa Monica, CA-based marketing consultant.

might spend the rest of your life overcoming such injuries."

Statewide Coverage The coverage of the program was introduced through print advertisements in the statewide newspaper, medical journals, magazines, and an educators' publication. The call to action in each ad asks for the reader's help. "Our objective is to invite the reader to call for more information and take Heads Up! to their schools and clubs," says Jeff Slaughter, director of media and publications. "The program is also a perfect opportunity to team with physicians, asking them to place posters in their offices and distribute brochures. This not only educates their patients, but reminds doctors that we offer rehabilitative services."

MMRC's strategy includes a Heads Up! do-it-yourself outline explaining how teachers and club leaders can present the program themselves. "You don't have to be a clinician to present this," says White. "Our instruction outline guides the moderator through the program, which includes a video presentation, injury prevention facts, and discussion questions."

Video Presentation The eight-minute video, produced in-house, features former MMRC patients whose injuries might have been prevented had they followed a few simple safety rules.

"No one can tell this story better than the people whose lives are affected by it," says Slaughter. "We interviewed people who shunned seat belts, bicycled without a helmet, drank and drove, or dove into water without checking the depth. Their message was universal: 'I never thought it would happen to me.'"

"Young people think they are invincible," says White. "They think they are going to live forever and that nothing can hurt them. This behavior invites risks that increase the chance of injury. It only takes a second to get injured, but the effects last a lifetime."

High Incidence of Injuries At the outset of the program, White and Slaughter learned that Mississippi's incidence of spinal cord injury is 2.5

times the national average. Given these statistics, MMRC believes the incidence of traumatic brain injuries is high as well. Statistics gathered by the state department of health for a recent one-year period showed that 62 percent of the spinal injured received their injury in a motor vehicle crash and that 93 percent of these were not wearing seat belts. "This only refueled our commitment to the program," says White.

Mississippi does have a law requiring people to wear seat belts. However, there is no penalty if one is caught without wearing a belt. "Unfortunately, a spinal injury is a lifetime penalty for refusing to wear a seat belt," says Slaughter.

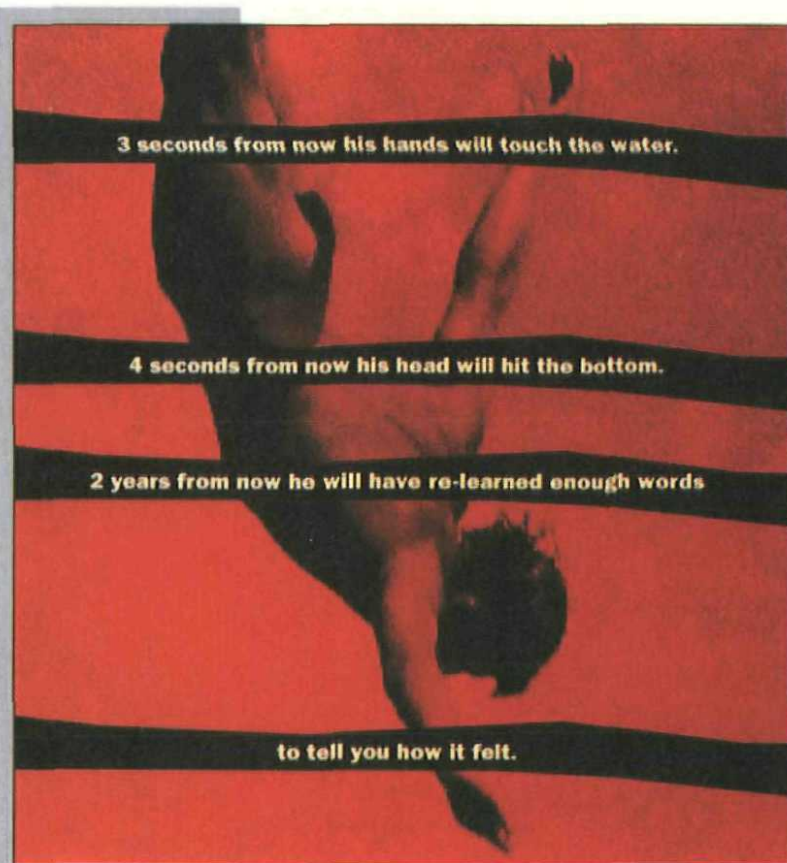
The state department of health attributes the high incidence of spinal cord injuries to Mississippi's favorable climate, a high illiteracy rate, and other cultural and social factors. "We believe safety education is the key to reducing this incidence rate and keeping more Mississippians healthy," says Slaughter.

And keeping Mississippians healthy keeps them from becoming a financial burden to their families and the state. "The financial toll these injuries take is tremendous," says White. "One can stay in inpatient rehabilitation anywhere from a few weeks to several months. And for these injuries, unfortunately, prevention is the only cure."

MMRC teamed up with San Francisco Giants pitcher Jeff Brantley to take the safety message directly to a Jackson public high school. Brantley explained how complications he experienced from a back injury he received as a youth nearly ruined his baseball career.

American Bicycle Month May, which is American Bicycle Month, was a busy period for MMRC's Heads Up! crew. "We asked 10 bicycle shops across the state to join us in promoting helmet usage during this month," says Slaughter. "Shop employees wore our shirts on Saturdays, displayed the posters, and distributed the brochures. We even sent the shops extra posters and shirts to give away in drawings."

MMRC also participated in a bike safety rally in memory of a physician who died of complications from injuries received in a bicycle accident. Teaming up with a prominent pediatrician's group, a bike shop, and a church, MMRC copre-



It only takes a second to think about safety. Even if the water looks fine, go feet first the first time. Or you might spend a lifetime wishing that you had.

MMRC
MISSISSIPPI METHODIST
REHABILITATION CENTER
1350 East Woodrow Wilson, Jackson, MS 39216
(601) 982-2611 or 1-800-233-6672

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sented the rally, which featured bike inspections, a bike course, safety seminars, and giveaways. Two Jackson television stations covered the event. And Heads Up! and a Jackson bike shop presented bicycle safety seminars at two elementary schools, reaching some 1,400 students with the message.

MMRC also pitched Heads Up! to high school newspaper sponsors and editors as a public service project. "We sent some 27 high school newspapers' sponsors an invitation to make

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EVANGELIZATION

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facilities to shared stewardship responsibilities with lay administrators and board members. Religious women are preparing the laity to accept their role in institutional ministry. As a result, congregational sponsors now minister through influence rather than through presence.

An increasing force in Catholic healthcare will be lay men and women who wish to join their values and life experiences with institutions having like values. Religious sponsors continue to face the challenge of empowering the laity to take the Gospel message beyond the church doors into everyday life. If congregations meet this challenge, a prepared Christian laity will emerge as equal partners with vowed religious and clergy in institutional ministry. □

NOTES

1. Pope Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World*, Daughters of St. Paul, New York City, 1975, para. 18-19.
2. *On Evangelization*, para. 14-15.
3. *On Evangelization*, para. 18.
4. Melanie DiPietro, *Congregational Sponsorship: Practical Issues in a Community Dialog*, Catholic Health Association of Wisconsin, Madison, WI, 1985, p. 4.
5. Patrick J. Brennen, *The Evangelizing Parish*, Tabor Publishing, Allen, TX, 1987, p. 11.
6. Before Vatican II many people viewed sacrament as something done to them. Post-Vatican II teaching emphasizes sacrament as a sign of God's care for us. Tad Guzie writes: "A sacrament is a festive action in which Christians assemble to celebrate their lived experience and to call to heart their common story. The action is a symbol of God's care for us. Enacting the symbol brings us closer to one another in the Church and to the Lord who is there for us" (*The Book of Sacramental Basics*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1981, p. 53).

MARKETING

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The program ads reached 7,000 high school students in the state.

Heads Up! a newspaper public service project," says Slaughter. "We converted one of our posters into a smaller ad and asked the newspapers to print the ad and a corresponding story. We also sent their staffs T-shirts and posters and asked them to wear the shirts and put up the posters the day their paper was published."

Seven high schools responded, reaching more than 7,000 students throughout the state. "We will continue this effort and send the newspapers a new ad and article early next fall," says Slaughter. "The cost is minimal and we're hitting the bull's eye in reaching our target audience."

PROGRAM RECOGNITION

The public relations campaign has received six awards from *Healthcare Marketing Report*, four Touchstone Awards from the American Hospital Association, and numerous other awards from local and regional organizations. It has been featured in *Advertising Age's Creativity* and *Art Direction* magazines, and the national office of the American Red Cross recently requested permission to use the ad featuring the diver in some of its safety information brochures.

"But the best reward we could receive would be to hear the state department of health report one day that Mississippi's incidence of spinal and brain injuries is well below the national average," says White. "That is our ultimate goal." □

MISSION

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the congregation's spirituality, community life, and mission. These might be adaptable to the needs of leaders who express a desire for a deeper inclusion in the congregation's life and mission.

WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

A hospital system I work with holds their CEOs, at their yearly performance review, accountable for their personal growth in mission consciousness, and for how they have moved to implement mission development in their organizations. The ultimate goal is to move toward an organization in which a broad ownership of leadership for mission exists, in the same manner that a total quality perspective might come to permeate an organization. Such initiatives are critical at this point in our history.

A window of opportunity exists to develop a mission-conscious and mission-driven lay leadership for our healthcare institutions. In 10 or 15 years, this opportunity will have passed because the sponsoring congregations that must lead the process will have fewer religious available. If we fail to take up this challenge, the Catholic identity of our healthcare institutions will be diluted to the point where it might be difficult to call them Catholic. This would be a tragedy in a society so in need of strong, values-driven institutions. □

NOTES

1. Commission on Catholic Health Care Ministry, *Catholic Health Ministry: A New Vision for a New Century*, Farmington Hills, MI, 1988, p. 10.
2. Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Doubleday/Currency, New York City, 1990, p. 354.
3. See John Haughey, *Converting 9 to 5: A Spirituality of Daily Work*, Crossroads, New York City, 1989.