

Bending the Curve

An Interview with Ramon Soto, Senior Vice President, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, Northwell Health

EDITORS' NOTE *Ramon Soto is a skilled marketing executive with deep healthcare and financial services experience. He is responsible for the development and execution of Northwell's brand strategy, as well as for all aspects of marketing and communications, including public relations, digital engagement, strategic marketing, clinical marketing, and customer acquisition. Soto is a member of Northwell Health's executive leadership, responsible for shaping the growth strategy and execution for the enterprise. He was formerly the Chief Marketing Officer for Magellan Health. Prior to Magellan, Soto was a Senior Vice President with Aetna, managing the commercial marketing function for the Aetna enterprise. Before his nine years at Aetna, he spent seven years at GE Capital. In 2006, Soto was admitted into Yale School of Management's MBA program for executives. He is also a graduate of GE Capital's Leadership Interchange, a high potential manager training program. He is Six Sigma certified, was awarded a U.S. government patent for co-development of GE Capital's product development process, and was an instructor at GE's Small Business College. Soto received a BA degree from the State University of New York at Binghamton, an MBA from the Yale School of Management. He also received an Advance Management Degree from Harvard Business School.*



Ramon Soto

Northwell Health has a history of leadership in addressing public health issues and taking on challenging topics. Will you discuss this focus and how you communicate these efforts?

This is an area we have debated heavily within the organization. Northwell Health serves the metro New York market where consumers have great choices for healthcare. I tip my hat to New York-Presbyterian which is a storied academic medical center that had their charter signed in the 1700s; NYU Langone that has been an innovator in clinical care; and Mount Sinai which is a storied health system – and here is Northwell Health, a 30-year-old challenger brand who truly sees healthcare differently.

We believe that the Northwell Health difference is that we engage and interact with consumers differently, and part of this is telling a broader story about health that is not just about the actual transaction or about being ranked in a specific specialty. Our value proposition is expressed through a very simple term: better health for all. COVID fortified

this purpose for us, and it is an absolute travesty that consumers experience care differently depending on who you are or where you live. It is a terrible notion that where you live can dictate how long you live. There are so many hidden injustices that sit right below the surface in healthcare that need an organization to focus on and address to bend the curve. An example is gun violence. Most consumers do not know that guns are now the leading cause of death for children in the United States. That is preposterous and as a society we need to do something about it.

How does Northwell Health approach its messaging around gun violence prevention and how important is it to address this issue as a public health crisis?

Before Northwell started tackling this issue, no other health system would talk about it, and it is because it is an incredibly slippery slope. It deals with a political issue that is at the heart of a tremendous amount of intolerance and camps at the extremes of the political spectrum. We leaned into the data and researched and experimented with a number of different ways to tell our message. You need to acknowledge that guns are not going anywhere, and to focus on how to make it a safer environment since even gun owners want to make it a safer environment.

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The reality is that we have seen over a 400 percent increase in children presenting in our Cohen Children's Hospital with gun wounds. The fact that we are in this crisis and in 2019 guns became the leading cause of death for children provides you with the opportunity to have a new and different conversation and fortifies the health-care lane to be engaged and lead in this conversation. Our research has shown that we are making an impact with consumers.

Northwell's campaign was targeted around parents and alerting them that there was this new threat that they need to protect their children from. Parents know that if their child has a food allergy, or if their child does not know how to swim, that when they drop them off at a friend's house, they need to make this known. Now, they also need to ask if there is an unlocked gun in the house. Only 14 percent of consumers who were not familiar with our campaign knew to ask if there was an unlocked gun in the house, but 34 percent of consumers that were exposed to the campaign said that they would now ask if there was an unlocked gun in the house. When it came to parents, 70 percent of those that were aware of the campaign said that they would ask if there was an unlocked gun in the house, which shows that we are moving the needle, regardless of political affiliation. We tested it with gun violence survivors, we tested it with police, we tested it with those across the political spectrum, and across the board we saw really strong scores.

You use the word “consumers” in an industry where many use the word “patients.” Will you discuss this distinction?

This is a debate that goes on in the industry and with physicians, and neither reference is wrong. When an individual has a health event and they present themselves to our institution, they are a patient, but this is a moment in time. As a person takes his or her journey of life, they are taking their journey of health, and they are a consumer in its broadest sense. At Northwell, we are taking this journey with the individual. We are not just a place to treat the sick – we need to partner with the individual to optimize their state of health.

The industry uses language which refers to the transaction – it is called the episode of care. This makes it seem that it is an episode that happens once, but there is a lead up to it, there is the actual episode, and then there is the aftermath. At each phase, we have a role in that individual's life. Northwell is leading in redefining how we can take the journey of health with the individual, and we are embracing the opportunity to deliver better health for all. ●