



Arrest the Risk - Raising Awareness to Help African Americans Stop Sudden Cardiac Arrest

BRG Communications and Heart Rythym Society (HRS), Jan 1,2013

Summary: 2013 Silver Anvil Award Winner — Multicultural Public Relations — Associations / Government / Nonprofit Organizations

Sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) is one of the leading causes of death in the United States each year, yet most Americans don't know what it is or how to prevent it. Research has shown there are significant gaps in communication regarding SCA among African Americans and the physicians who treat them. The Heart Rhythm Society (HRS) engaged BRG Communications to create a large-scale campaign to address this under-recognized health issue by elevating the dialogue about SCA, its symptoms, risk factors and treatments in effort to improve overall awareness and understanding at both the national and grassroots level.

Multicultural public relations includes any type of program, such as institutional, marketing and community relations, specifically targeted to a cultural group.

Full Text: SITUATION ANALYSIS

Sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) is one of the leading causes of death in the United States each year, yet most Americans don't know what it is or how to prevent it. Ninety-five percent of people who experience the condition die as a result. The condition disproportionately impacts minorities – particularly African Americans. Research has shown that a large percentage of high-risk patients are not aware of SCA and are not receiving lifesaving treatments, resulting in greater mortality rates. In addition, there are significant gaps in communication regarding SCA among African Americans and the physicians who treat them. As a specialty organization representing medical, allied health, and science professionals from more than 70 countries who specialize in cardiac rhythm disorders, the Heart Rhythm Society (HRS) recognized an opportunity to leverage their position as a leading resource on cardiac pacing and electrophysiology to increase awareness of SCA among African Americans and overcome the barriers to proper diagnosis and treatment.

Challenge: The Heart Rhythm Society (HRS) engaged BRG Communications to create a large-scale campaign to address this under-recognized health issue by elevating the dialogue about SCA, its symptoms, risk factors and treatments in effort to improve overall awareness and understanding at both the national and grassroots level.

RESEARCH

Secondary

BRG Communications reviewed existing research to shed light on the link between SCA and African Americans:

- A study on racial differences in the incidence of cardiac arrest and subsequent survival found that African Americans were significantly more likely to experience cardiac arrest in every age group compared to Caucasians.
- The survival rate after an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest among African Americans was about one-third that of Caucasians.

- Among patients admitted to the hospital, the survival rate for African Americans was slightly more than half that for Caucasians.

Primary

BRG Communications and HRS worked with Ipsos Healthcare to conduct a 20-minute online survey of more than 1,500 adult consumers and 300 physicians in the U.S. regarding their awareness of SCA, its risk factors and recommended treatments as well as perspectives regarding barriers to care. A representative sample of Caucasian, African American and Hispanic consumers were surveyed, as well as a sample of three types of physicians— primary care physicians (PCPs) including those in general practice, family practice and internal medicine; cardiologists; and electrophysiologists (EPs), who are cardiac arrhythmia specialists. Among the key findings:

- African Americans are significantly less familiar with sudden cardiac arrest, with only 18 percent able to correctly identify the condition, compared with 24 percent of the general population.
- 90 percent of African Americans say their doctor has never talked to them about their risk for SCA.
- More than 60 percent of African Americans who reported no prior heart disease diagnosis who experience heart disease symptoms do not go to the doctor after experiencing those symptoms.
- Nearly half of physicians did not rank SCA as the condition that poses the greatest risk to Americans today, even though SCA claims more lives each year than stroke, breast cancer, lung cancer or AIDS.

PLANNING

Objectives

- Increase awareness of sudden cardiac arrest, including risk factors and recommended treatments, particularly among African American audiences
- Drive at-risk consumers to learn more about SCA by visiting www.ArrestTheRisk.org
- Engage at-risk communities to build dialogue around SCA and share valuable information about risk and treatments
- Drive patient referrals to cardiac electrophysiologists to properly evaluate risks and available treatments

Target Audiences

Primary - African American adults (women and men 35+)

Secondary - Referring physicians (cardiologists, General Practitioners), HRS Members, and third party groups (advocacy and professional societies)

Strategic Approach

- **Engage renowned African American electrophysiologist** to communicate health messages for purposes of national media launch/outreach.
- **Leverage African American celebrity with family history of heart disease** to communicate to target audiences regarding the impact to the African American community.
- **Engage strategic grassroots partner/advocacy group** to elevate the issue in local markets and increase engagement.
- **Conduct aggressive national media outreach targeting African American media outlets** with story package including HRS/Ipsos consumer research study results, expert spokespeople and compelling patient stories.
- **Leverage multiple moments in time** to engage media and deliver SCA education throughout the year.
- **Implement local market media and grassroots education initiative** to inspire at-risk individuals to action.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Engaged Dr. Walter K. Clair of Vanderbilt University Medical Center and Shaun Robinson, Emmy-award winning journalist and Access Hollywood co-host to deliver campaign messages to African American audiences.
- Engaged with the Association of Black Cardiologists as a partner to help deliver campaign messages.
- Created campaign materials including consumer and physician fact sheets with key findings from the Ipsos Healthcare research study.
- Created and launched a campaign website, www.ArrestTheRisk.org, to provide resources for consumers as well as a separate online media resource site with downloadable PSAs and other media materials
- Worked with physician spokesperson to identify compelling patient stories for purposes of media outreach.
- Created a national media launch including national press release, satellite media tour and long-lead media tour targeted toward women's and healthcare outlets.
- Pitched top-tier African American media outlets including TheGrio.com, Jet.com, The Tom Joyner Show, Essence, Ebony and TheRoot.com.
- Created and distributed a video Public Service Announcement (PSA) featuring Shaun Robinson, encouraging African American audiences to talk to their doctor about their risk for SCA. PSA was distributed to TV stations and online.
- Distributed matte news release educating consumers regarding SCA, its risk factors and recommended treatments and driving readers back to www.ArrestTheRisk.org.
- Used seasonal timing hook to create and distribute Audio News Release (ANR) with physician spokesperson to encourage African Americans talk to their loved ones over the holidays regarding family heart history.
- Leveraged timing hook of February Heart Health month to conduct an additional national media outreach including a Radio Media Tour (RMT) and a radio PSA featuring Shaun Robinson.
- Launched a 10-city grassroots SCA education initiative during February Heart Health Month.
- Executed a local market media outreach campaign in 10 target markets with high incidence of SCA. Utilized local physician spokespersons provided by the Association of Black Cardiologists, as well as statistics regarding the SCA risk factors for each market.
- Created personal risk assessments and distributed at church and community events in 10 target cities to encourage attendees to talk to their doctor about their risk.

EVALUATION

Objective 1: Increase awareness of sudden cardiac arrest, including risk factors and recommended treatments, particularly among African American audiences.

Results: Media outreach for this campaign resulted in more than 6,600 placements and more than 340 million media impressions, including more 60 million viewing the TV PSA. The campaign was particularly successful in reaching audiences through top-tier African American media outlets, with high-profile placements in TheRoot.com, TheGrio.com, Essence Magazine, Jet.com, Ebony.com, American Urban Radio Network and BlackAmericaWeb.com, the online website of the Tom Joyner Morning Show. Other high-profile placements included Fox & Friends, Access Hollywood and Yahoo! Health. In addition, over **98% of media coverage included two or more campaign messages.**

Objective 2: Drive at-risk consumers to learn more about SCA by visiting www.ArrestTheRisk.org

Results: As a result of the campaign, more than 6,700 people went online to www.ArrestTheRisk.org to learn more about SCA and download campaign materials, including a personal risk assessment.

Objective 3: Engage at-risk communities to build dialogue around SCA and share valuable information about risk and treatments

Results: HRS partnered with the Association of Black Cardiologists to conduct grassroots outreach in 10 markets including Nashville, TN; Jackson, MS; New Orleans, Atlanta, Oakland, CA; Detroit, Chicago, Dallas, Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. Outreach is still underway; however, events and other activity in target markets are anticipated to reach approximately 5,000 at-risk individuals. Media outreach in the 10 target markets helped to drive awareness of SCA, resulting in 12 confirmed media interviews thus far and a total of 25 anticipated.

Objective 4: Drive patient referrals to cardiac electrophysiologists to properly evaluate risks and available treatments

Results: All campaign materials and media placements including a call-to-action for consumers to talk to their doctor about their risk for SCA and to ask for a referral to a cardiac electrophysiologist. HRS and ABC are working with their network of participating physicians to track referrals as a result of this campaign through a post-campaign survey at 3 and 6 months. The campaign also secured placement for the research study in the *Heart Rhythm Journal* and at the HRS Annual Scientific Sessions, which reach a combined audience of 16,000.

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