

Women's Health Programming: In Tune with the Times

by Nancy Coey, professional speaker

Ten years ago, when I began speaking at women's health events, the norm was a two hour program on a weekday evening centered around one specific health concern (menopause, for example, or heart disease); an audience of about 40–60 women; a hospital doctor speaking for 30 minutes, Q&A, short break, and then I'd speak for whatever time remained.

Things sure have changed. Now the audience size is anywhere from 300 to a 1,000; more often than not, many health topics are covered, and the tone has gone from "How do I manage this condition?" to how to live a life of health, vitality, energy and zest. **Disease is out; health is in.**

I interviewed some of the women who have been at the heart of this change. My only "rule" was that each woman be willing to share her contact info and be available for follow-up questions. (Everyone said "Yes!" without hesitation; contact information can be found at the end of the article). To keep to a reasonable length, I focused on just four hospital programs: two that operate independently and two that have national affiliation.

Six themes emerged:

1. Know your community. What works in one place will not necessarily work somewhere else.
2. A woman's time is limited and precious. Either keep your programs short or pack them with value.
3. Women's programming is no longer about information only; it's about an experience.
4. Address the *whole* woman; health is about mind-body-spirit connection.
5. What works . . . and what doesn't.
6. The return.

Linda Skillman, Director of The Center for Women's Health at Major Hospital in Shelbyville, IN, has for 10 years been putting on an evening women's event twice/year with an audience ranging from 300 to 450. (Shelbyville is a town of 18,000.) The program originally started as healthcare education; did not have nationally recognized speakers; had very small attendance; and went from 20 to more than 300 about eight years ago.

1. Know your community: We once tried a day-long Saturday program, no response. Saturday doesn't work for us. We've learned that women don't have much time. Tuesdays work. The one time we tried a Wednesday, attendance was down. The key is to know your community.

2. Time is precious: We've learned that women don't have much time. The program is precisely from 7:30 to 8:30 PM and all but a few minutes of that is the speaker.

3. The *whole* woman: Women want to laugh and have fun. The evening is about their spirit.

4. An *experience*: Even though the program doesn't start until 7:30 PM, women are often here by 5:30 PM. They make an evening of it. They'll leave their cars in the parking lot and all go out to dinner together. Then they end the evening with laughter.

5. What works: Humor and programs by women for women. We always have female speakers.

6. The return: Our Center's goal is to see to the emotional and physical needs of women and judging from their emails

and phone calls, we know that we're doing it!

Laura Reyka, Director of The Women's Center at Gettysburg Hospital in Gettysburg, PA, has been putting on a day-long Saturday event for 13 years. When the event started, 24 were in attendance; now there are between 300 and 350 women so loyal that they wouldn't dream of missing the day.

1. Know your community: Listen and survey what the women want and need. Women are so busy caring for others, they deserve a day just for themselves. Holding an annual event helps to encourage women to attend. Sometimes it takes several years for a woman to commit a day to herself, but once she does, she quickly feels the benefits.

2. Time is precious: Our day is packed – from keynotes to breakouts to vendors to sisterhood to great food! Women feel their time is well spent.

3. The *whole* woman: We have breakouts on health topics such as menopause, lymphadema and pre-diabetes. We also have complementary health topics such as gardening, relaxation techniques, and the importance of pets presented by a local female veterinarian.

4. An *experience*: There are so many magical parts associated with women's conferences: spotlighting a local woman's successful entrepreneurship, reacquainting with an old friend, or celebrating a milestone with female relatives and friends. You then add wonderful food and it reminds me of the

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book title that I love, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*. Some of the best conversations happen in the kitchen and at our women's conference. You have that same feeling of comfort, empowerment and trust.

5. What works: All female presenters. A program for women by women. Women say, 'I like this.' If I had to pick one topic for the keynote presenter it would be humor. Women want to laugh. The most popular breakout topics have always been nutrition, stress management, and body movement. Quieter but just as important: anything about sexuality. Our breakout rooms are various sizes so it is helpful to have more sensitive topics that draw a smaller crowd in a small room which helps with the comfort level and easier conversations.

6. Return: The day is sponsored by Gettysburg Hospital and it shines brightly on the hospital. Hospital service lines are both exhibitors and speakers so the community is aware of what their local hospital has to offer. Fees paid by the carefully chosen vendors help to keep the cost affordable.

Michele Wood, Manager of Health Services at St. Francis Hospital in Indianapolis, IN, is a long-time member of the *Spirit of Women* network. Michele has been in women's health for 15 years and has run hundreds of programs. She started with monthly doctor's programs and has evolved into a belief in Health-U-Tainment. She values her *Spirit of Women* membership as a way to upgrade services, for the national partnership, and for the consistent voice and consistent look it offers.

1. Know your community: Our hospital is in a very competitive environment. For us, 130 women is a huge attendance; for a sister hospital, 300 is the norm.

2. Time is precious: Women can get information on the Internet but they want a face-to-face connection with a trusted source.

3. The whole woman: It's not about information any more; it's about relationships.

4. An experience: Our Annual *Day of Dance* program, for example, makes heart health come alive and offers our guests strategies they can use. It truly is an experience.

5. What works: Softer, catchier titles; guaranteed fun; camaraderie; engagement with the consumer audience for the best experience.

6. Return: You can track utilization of our services from these programs.

Tanya Abreu is President and National Program Director of *Spirit of Women*, based in Boca Raton, FL. It is a national coalition of hospitals and healthcare facilities in more than 55 U.S. cities joined together to advance the cause and business of women's health. Tanya is a national voice for women's health and a driving force behind *Spirit of Women's* success.

1. Know your community: The fact that markets are so different offers a rich opportunity to see how women view health. In the South, family and community and social networking are paramount. In the NE, programs focus on convenience, energy, and encouraging life. In the Midwest, health is seen as a legacy, something that involves self and family. In CA, there's a buzz; good health offers creative opportunities. In other words, the community drives how the hospital should market.

2. Time is precious: I have learned that getting good health care from a good provider is the most important decision a woman can make. It affects everything: life, family, beauty, energy.

Health care is life care. We have moved

from disease to prevention and vitality. And women will make time if a program addresses this.

3. The whole woman: the mind-body-spirit connection: *Spirit* programs are successful because they transform to a broad health scope that includes all service lines of a hospital and addresses the entire totality of a woman: mind, body and spirit.

4. An experience: Successful programs offer satisfaction on multiple levels. Men, for example, are interested in a solution to a problem. Women are interested in an *experience* that helps enrich their lives. They're looking for motivation and humor.

5. What works: What *doesn't* work: transfer of information only. Women now have extraordinary access to information. Also, fancy advertising campaigns do *not* work. No cream will get rid of wrinkles. What *does* work: engage a woman's emotions, loyalty, and sense of humor. The goal is a longer life, more vitality, more energy. To feel better about themselves and their lives.

6. Return: One, more volume and more revenue. Women will use the hospital more appropriately and regularly without fear. Two, a way to fulfill your mission of compassion, hospitality, and hospice.

Kristin Caudell is Manager of Corporate & Community Health at WellStar Health System in Marietta, GA, which for nine years has been part of the successful *Speaking of Women's Health* network. *Speaking of Women's Health* events sell out within days of being announced; the most recent Wellstar event had more than 1,200 women in attendance. Kristin values *Speaking of Women's Health's* first-class tools and support, their recognizable brand, and their outstanding reputation.

1. Know your community: It's important to evaluate your audience and to reach out to ALL life stages of women. Our women are interested in Edu-Tainment. They want to get information but they also want to have fun while doing it.

2. Time is precious: We appreciate that these women have chosen to spend time with us, and we want the women to feel that their time is well spent. The conference is a great opportunity to provide them with a well rounded day packed with wellness information that will help improve their health and well-being.

3. The whole woman: We find that women today are most interested in programs on reducing stress and ways to achieve an overall healthy lifestyle, instead of just the typical health topics. We strive always to encompass the mind, body and spirit.

4. An experience: From the moment women walk in and are given tote bags overflowing with gifts, they know they are in for an experience. Music, lavishly decorated tables, wonderful food, and high-energy presentations all add to the mix. We want them to feel pampered.

5. What works: Keeping it fresh, a new national theme every year, and the variety: the keynotes, the screenings, the breakouts. Reducing stress and how to have a healthy lifestyle are very popular breakout topics.

6. Return: We ask: 'As a result of what you've learned, do you plan to use one of our services?' 60-70% say yes. Also, funded by dollars from the *Speaking of Women's Health* event, we have a contemporary and very recognizable program 4 times/year that allows us to showcase our talents and cross market our service lines. Our goal is to build and maintain a strong relationship with the women in our community. We want them to feel connected to us and to look to us as their primary resource for all their healthcare needs – not only for themselves, but for their families as well.

Laurel Green is Director of Hospital Networks and Special Projects for the *National Speaking of Women's Health Foundation*, a non-profit organization that educates and empowers women nationwide through more than 50 conferences and events across the country. Laurel says that "for years, health providers and academics have said, 'We

know; come hear.' But there's a disconnect between how the providers speak and the public hears. Women's programs bridge that divide by creating a meaningful connection. *Speaking of Women's Health* is so profound and unique because it provides an opportunity that satisfies the provider and the audience."

1. Know your community: The National Speaking of Women's Health Foundation is entering its second decade and knows the importance of meaningful relationships with hospital partners. We grow thoughtfully and strategically. We're a non-profit that aligns with other non-profits who share our mission and passion for helping women make informed healthcare decisions. We develop sustaining partnerships with health systems who maintain the high quality experience that's at the heart of our success.

2. Time is precious: Women have so little time but are hungry for social connectedness, for problem solving. We crave reliable information along with a positive experience, but it must be worth the investment of precious personal time. Women tell us over and over, 'I want to spend my time on what's significant and on what makes me a better woman.'

3. The whole woman: One of the things that makes *Speaking of Women's Health* so unique is that it addresses everyone in the circle. The all-inclusiveness of health, well-being and personal safety. Your body, your spirit, financial health, car repair; the sum of all parts; 'the whole and healthy woman.'

4. An experience: We want women to get reliable, trusted information, but we also want them to feel special and cared for. Trusted, unbiased information is important, but so is social networking. It's very significant for women to have trusted relationships.

5. What works: Most of all, the variety and the freshness works. The breakout sessions held at our conferences include the important and obvious topics such as heart health, bone health, women and cancer. But the

surprise popularity of more atypical topics includes belly dancing, an enjoyment of movement that fosters better health. Women are always drawn to topics about healthy food/cooking; and how to create financial well-being (a direct correlation to health and stress).

6. Return: *Speaking of Women's Health* templated format goes beyond the day and creates a philanthropic event. Dollars are reinvested into the community to support women and children.

I hope, whether you've been hosting women's programs for a long time or are just embarking upon this exciting venture, that you've found something here that will make your job more fun and your results more predictable. I encourage you to contact any of the women who've contributed; they are each happy to share. And, on a personal note, the difficult part in writing this article was in limiting it to just four examples since I've enjoyed every place I've been. I feel honored and blessed to be part of such an exciting time in women's health. ●

Nancy Coey specializes in speaking at women's health events. Her most requested program is "What Would Happen If I DID Remove the Mattress Tag?!"
nancy@nancycoey.com. 919-848-9743.

Contact Information:

Linda Skillman, Major Hospital,
Shelbyville, IN.
lskillman@majorhospital.org;

Laura Reyka, Gettysburg Hospital,
Gettysburg, PA. lreyka@wellspan.org;

Michele Wood, St. Francis Hospital,
Indianapolis, IN.
Michele.Wood@ssfhs.org;

Tanya Abreu, Spirit of Women, Boca
Raton, FL. TABreu@SpiritofWomen.com;

Kristin Caudell, Wellstar, Atlanta, GA,
Kristin.Caudell@wellstar.org;

Laurel Green, Speaking of Women's
Health, Cincinnati, OH.
lgreen@speakingofwomenshealth.com.