

Title: World Thrombosis Day Helps the World Learn “How to Save a Life”

Overview

More people lose their lives annually to blood clots in Europe and the U.S. than AIDS, breast cancer, and motor vehicle crashes combined. The World Thrombosis Day campaign (WTD), created and led by the International Society on Thrombosis and Haemostasis (ISTH), is a year-long global movement to increase awareness of thrombosis (commonly known as blood clots) and place a global spotlight on the condition as an urgent and growing health problem.

While the world’s attention was almost entirely focused on COVID-19, WTD faced a daunting challenge. A definitive correlation between COVID-19 and blood clots was discovered, but this was only a piece of the blood clot story. In one sense, the COVID-19 correlation was highly important and demonstrably beneficial to the public and medical professionals struggling to understand COVID-19’s dimensions and impact. But gender-associated thrombosis links the disorder to myriad health effects in women. Cancer and hospital-associated thrombosis are equally threatening. Up to 60 percent of blood clots, known as venous thromboembolism (VTE), occur during or after hospitalization, making it a leading, yet often preventable, cause of hospital-related death. In short, as vital as the COVID-19 information was, WTD’s mission extended much further.

To tell the complete story, WTD focused its global campaign in 2021 on earned media to benefit from the inherent third-party credibility of the press. Target countries around the world were identified based on the prevalence of the condition in each region and the availability of medical subject matter experts.

Insights & Analysis

Upon its founding in 2014, the WTD Steering Committee commissioned an Ipsos-Reid global survey to quantify global public awareness about thrombosis and VTE. The survey, conducted in nine representative countries, included respondents of different ages to assess generational differences in awareness. This survey found that only half of respondents were aware of the term “pulmonary embolism” and only 44 percent knew the term “deep vein thrombosis” as compared to 88 percent awareness of heart attack and 85 percent awareness of stroke. Since the original study, anecdotal information from health care providers and leaders in the field who serve on the WTD Steering Committee, indicated little had changed.

In addition to referencing the foundational study, the WTD 2021 team relied upon in-depth impact reports from prior campaign years to evaluate which tactics were most effective. Though more than 268 million impressions were secured in 2019, the goals for 2021 were much loftier, with a target of five billion total global impressions. This reflected appreciation of the potential impact of COVID-19 related coverage, as well as the need to go beyond that singular focus. COVID-19 did provide a foundation for media outreach, but that alone would not sustain the level of media engagement needed to meet the campaign goal established by the Steering Committee.

The WTD team conducted in-depth stakeholder interviews with numerous subject matter experts, to understand the various facets of this life-threatening condition, prior year campaigns, as well as concepts for ongoing media approaches and angles. The team also engaged with partner public relations firms activated in specific target regions around the world to gather insights on a variety of thrombosis-specific topics.

Planning

The overarching goals for WTD 2021 were to:

- Secure high-value, high impact coverage by targeting top-tier media with quality stories
- Position WTD as a primary source for the media by providing experts and information on thrombosis
- Stimulate increased awareness of thrombosis in India, Asia and East Africa while building on previous successes in Latin America, Ireland and the United Kingdom
- Activate other new avenues for broadening outreach and awareness

In prior years, WTD media outreach relied heavily on paid distribution tactics such as mat releases and wire press releases. Beginning in 2020, the team changed course and placed a greater emphasis on direct, personalized outreach

to top-tier media. In 2021, U.S. and global partner agencies also identified media opportunities and approaches that would be most effective in each of their countries including Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Kenya, Uganda, Thailand, and India. A comprehensive plan was developed and presented to the WTD Steering Committee for approval.

The WTD team also identified creative measures that could further prompt and enhance media interest in the blood clot story. These included patient story posts and videos, influencer outreach, illuminating major landmarks in campaign brand colors, hosting Reddit AMA forums, and forging partnerships with key regional entities, such as international health ministries and professional sports teams.

To best align the efforts of multiple partner PR firms, and to ensure full WTD Steering Committee approval before deployment, strategic plans were developed by each agency and merged into a comprehensive global strategy. As a worldwide campaign mobilizing many individuals and resources across a range of time zones, regular check-ins and reporting were scheduled at the outset to ensure work was performed on time, on plan and on target.

Execution

Upon plan approval, the campaign shifted into high gear beginning in April 2021. The team proactively identified and pitched media around the world. The WTD team mobilized resources to relentlessly deliver new and regularly updated story ideas to journalists with an established interest in health care, lifestyle, and women's issues. WTD subject matter experts offered briefings, interviews, on-air appearances, and online deliveries of information. They appeared on Reddit. They generated by-lines and op-eds. They activated, often on short notice, to seize opportunistic media engagements to tremendous effect.

Central to all media efforts was a consistent and direct pitching initiative. The team secured stories on cancer, gender, COVID-19, and hospital-associated VTE. Story angles were created and delivered to precise media targets. Rarely were they rejected. Unparalleled top-tier coverage resulted, and WTD's expert insights were made available to billions of people.

Yet even as the primary emphasis remained on media outreach, additional creative tactics paid significant dividends. Landmarks as diverse as Niagara Falls in Ontario, Canada, and Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro—one of the Seven Wonders of the World—illuminated in campaign colors to support WTD and prompted explanatory press coverage. Influencer campaigns were mounted to drive public engagement. Additionally, a global WTD webinar for health professionals convened with more than 1,500 participants - a record-breaking number of registrants.

Evaluation

When October 13 arrived, the WTD team delivered on the original strategic goal of top-tier media emphasis. Many of the world's most prominent news organizations, such as TN (Argentina), The Herald (Scotland), Quint (India), Nation (Kenya), and the Wall Street Journal (U.S.), carried the story and, rather than rely heavily on the prior used paid media approach, more than 75 percent of all coverage was earned placements. Only newswire distribution of a multi-media release was used to supplement earned press. Overall, WTD 2021 produced the most successful campaign results, including media coverage, since its inception in 2014.

As much as the focus on quality was realized, the campaign also exceeded its quantity goal with more than 900 media placements across digital, print, and broadcast outlets. Over 4.7 billion of the amassed impressions were secured through earned efforts.

Inclusive of paid coverage, the WTD 2021 campaign achieved well over 5 billion impressions worldwide - surpassing one billion more impressions than in 2020 and more than two billion more impressions than 2019. Perhaps most important, the campaign connected reporters to leading medical experts during a time of crisis all around the world. It is with these relationships that WTD has effectively laid the groundwork for continued growth of the campaign. Particularly, as the once prominent topic of COVID-19 associated thrombosis begins to lose steam, it is of increased importance to uncover new creative story angles that will effectively continue the campaign at its previous trajectory.