Out of the Wrong Hands/Medication Safety
Community Relations, Internal Communications and Public Relations Teams
Cardinal Health
Dublin, Ohio

NEED/OPPORTUNITY / As a leading provider of products and services supporting the health care industry and a Fortune 18 company, Cardinal Health realized the company could have a meaningful impact on the social problem of prescription drug abuse. As the statistics reveal, the need is critical:

- Twelve- to 17-year-olds abuse prescription drugs more than they abuse ecstasy, crack/cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine combined (Partnership for a Drug Free America).
- Among 12- and 13-year-olds, prescription drugs are the drug of choice (National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2006; Office of Applied Studies).
- Four out of 5 of the most-abused narcotics in high schools are prescription drugs (Partnership for a Drug Free America).
- Forty percent of teens surveyed believed that prescription and over-the-counter medications are safer to use than illegal drugs (the Office of National Drug Control Policy).
- There are more deaths from overdoses of prescription opiod painkillers than from cocaine and heroin (Partnership for a Drug Free America).

As one of the nation’s leading pharmaceutical distributors, Cardinal Health also deals with protecting the integrity of the pharmaceutical supply chain. Because criminals are becoming increasingly sophisticated, the company has had to put increasingly stringent controls on customer orders of controlled drugs, which inconveniences customers, such as hospitals and retail pharmacies, the vast majority of whom need the drugs to meet legitimate patient needs. Ordering controlled substances was becoming cumbersome, and customers needed to understand why. In addition, Cardinal Health realized its societal responsibility to try and prevent prescription drugs from getting into the hands of abusers; thus, Cardinal Health public affairs, in partnership with quality & regulatory affairs, launched the Out of the Wrong Hands campaign.

INTENDED AUDIENCES / Cardinal Health committed to raising awareness about prescription drug abuse with three audiences:

1. Cardinal Health employees: The primary target audience was the more than 30,000 Cardinal Health employees worldwide. Raising awareness about prescription drug abuse was seen as an opportunity to:
   - Renew employee respect and understanding for the responsibility they have as members of the health care industry.
   - Reach them as members of communities, with children, grandchildren and friends, who could become victims of prescription drug abuse. For example, employees needed to know why they should not keep unused, old prescription drugs in easily accessible places at home. Because an estimated 40 percent of Cardinal Health employees have children at home, this audience was both relevant and substantial.
2. **Local communities, particularly teenagers, close to Cardinal Health:** As a corporate citizen, Cardinal Health sought to reach its communities—especially teenagers—with the important message about the dangers of prescription drug abuse. Teens are increasingly taking prescriptions not prescribed to them under the false impression that they will offer a “safe high” compared to “bad” drugs like cocaine.

3. **Community pharmacists, particularly customers:** Because pharmacists are among the most trusted members of the community and have a vested interest in this issue, Cardinal Health wanted to explore how to reach out to community pharmacists, especially those who are Cardinal Health customers, and support them in their efforts to raise awareness about prescription drug abuse. In addition, Cardinal Health hoped that engaging them in the cause would help address some customer dissatisfaction with the stringent controls the company had put in place on controlled substance orders to protect the integrity of the supply chain.

**GOALS AND OBJECTIVES** / Goal No. 1 was to raise awareness about medication safety and prescription drug abuse. More specifically, short-term communication objectives were to:
1. Raise awareness about medication safety and prescription drug abuse among employees of Cardinal Health by 50 percent by the end of 2009.
2. Develop tactics to reach teens in meaningful ways about the issue of prescription drug abuse.
3. Collaborate with community organizations to help them raise awareness of prescription drug abuse.
4. Increase awareness among community pharmacists of their role in keeping prescription drugs “out of the wrong hands” and of Cardinal Health’s commitment to support them in this critical social issue. The short-term goal was to reach at least 50 percent of Cardinal Health community pharmacist customers by the end of 2009.

**SOLUTION OVERVIEW** / To reach employees, the team implemented four internal communication tactics:

1. **Medication Safety intranet page:** Because its employees are geographically dispersed, Cardinal Health launched a medication safety site on the employee intranet. The purpose of the site was to educate employees about the operational steps being taken to enhance supply chain integrity and to provide them with “what to do” and “who to contact” resources both at work and at home. This included an extensive list of external links and resources, as well as several organizations in which employees could become active in fighting against prescription drug abuse.

2. **“Out of the Wrong Hands” collateral:** A four-color brochure was mailed directly to employees’ homes. Home delivery not only conveyed that this was a priority, but also increased the chance of the information getting to children and family members. In addition, corresponding full-color posters were posted in employee work sites. The collateral featured photos of teens, a list of shocking statistics about prescription drug abuse, helpful information and tips, and a description of operational changes put in place to help ensure medication safety along the supply chain.

3. **Employee briefings:** Educational employee “briefings” kept the information flowing and the dialogue going. Senior management and industry experts held question-and-answer panels about medication safety and prescription drug abuse. The briefings, held at the
4. **Keynote speaker at National Meeting:** Cardinal Health invited Kim Obert, a mother who lost her son to prescription drug abuse and a spokesperson for the Partnership for a Drug Free America, to address nearly 2,000 sales, operations and marketing leaders at Cardinal Health’s 2009 Annual National Meeting. Following the presentation, employees were encouraged to donate to the organization and support the cause.

To reach teens, Cardinal Health pursued two teen-focused programs, one internal and one external:

1. **Teen-to-Teen Slogan Contest for children of employees:** While the corporate theme for this initiative was “Out of the Wrong Hands,” Cardinal Health wanted a tagline that would resonate with teens. Public affairs created an opportunity to directly involve the teenaged children of Cardinal Health employees by asking them to develop a slogan for the teen-focused part of the campaign. The reward was an iPod Touch and an appearance at a company-wide town hall meeting. Senior management was completely on board: Craig Morford, chief compliance officer, agreed to be the executive sponsor and a judge for the contest; Shelley Bird, executive vice president of public affairs, and Mark Hartman, senior vice president of supply chain integrity, not only agreed to be judges, but also to be involved throughout the initiative. The contest was promoted electronically and reinforced through employee meetings. A series of feature articles headlined the intranet site. Rules and entry forms were available online for employees to download and take home to their teens.

2. **PSA video contest in conjunction with the Wexner Center for the Arts:** Cardinal Health partnered with the Wexner Center for the Arts, based in Columbus, Ohio, to add a new component to the Wexner Center's annual short film/video competition for high school students. Cardinal Health commissioned five entrants of the Wexner Center’s annual video contest to create a 15-second public service announcement (PSA) with a teen-to-teen message about prescription drug abuse. The public and employees got to vote on the “best” PSA. And as a perfect dovetail, the PSA contest used the winning slogan from the employee Teen-to-Teen Slogan Contest as its theme; thus putting the winning slogan of that contest into action almost immediately as the winning PSAs appeared on the Cardinal Health web site.

While most of the tactics involved collaboration with community organizations, Cardinal Health also reached out to the broader community with two specific solutions:

1. **Medication Safety web page:** The company launched a “Medication Safety” web page on its public web site, cardinalhealth.com, that describes the issue and communicates what Cardinal Health is doing about it, both from a supply chain integrity and a community health perspective. The Teen-to-Teen slogan contest winners and their entries were posted here, as well as links to several outside resources.

2. **Medication Disposal Day:** Cardinal Health collaborated with a large local health care system called OhioHealth to create “Medication Disposal Day,” a day when members of the public were invited to bring their expired and unused medications to a local OhioHealth hospital for safe and proper disposal—no questions asked. Cardinal Health employees volunteered to help with the day’s activities.
Finally, Cardinal Health explored ideas to reach community pharmacists, especially those who are Cardinal Health customers, and support their efforts to raise awareness about prescription drug abuse.

1. **Ray Bullman appearance:** Building on its strong relationship with the Ohio State University College of Pharmacy, Cardinal Health sponsored the school’s guest speaker, Ray Bullman from the National Council on Patient Information and Education, and his presentation about prescription drug diversion and abuse at the Ohio Pharmacists Association conference. While in town, Mr. Bullman also spoke at the OSU College of Pharmacy, a Cardinal Health employee briefing and other events.

2. **Seminars at the Cardinal Health Retail Business Conference:** Cardinal Health marketing teams convened seminars at its annual Retail Business Conference, a company-sponsored trade show attended by 3,000+ pharmacy owners and their teams, on the topics of diversion and prescription drug abuse. These seminars addressed the issue of stricter controls on prescription drugs head-on and provided resources to help pharmacists take an active role in the fight.

3. **Community Pharmacy pilot programs:** Cardinal Health partnered with both the Ohio Pharmacists Association and the OSU College of Pharmacy to begin pilot programs aimed at providing educational materials about prescription drug abuse to communities through their local pharmacist. In October 2009, Cardinal Health announced a US$100,000 grant to support the programs.

**IMPLEMENTATION AND CHALLENGES / Project budget.** Most of the tactics used internal resources and electronic communication vehicles to minimize expenses. The *Out of the Wrong Hands* collateral project had a budget of US$25,000 for printing and mailing. The slogan contest was run electronically, and the prizes were donated, so the cost of the contest and employee briefings was US$0. Two grants were awarded through the Cardinal Health Foundation, which has a dedicated community outreach budget it must spend each year: US$30,000 for the PSA contest and US$100,000 for the community pharmacy pilots. Finally, a modest outlay of US$750 for travel expenses was provided to sponsor Ray Bullman’s visit to the Ohio Pharmacy Association and Columbus.

**Time frame.** The *Out of the Wrong Hands* campaign started with the employee intranet page launch in April 2008. This was followed quickly by the web page launch, the collateral mailing and posters, the Teen-to-Teen Slogan Contest, employee briefings, the Wexner Center competition, state pharmacy conference, the Retail Business Conference, and the Annual National Meeting and Medication Disposal Day. Effectively, tactics were in action every month of the 2009 calendar year. The campaign continues today.

**Limitations and challenges.** In addition to budget challenges, one key concern was that the topic of prescription drug safety would go on the back burner after a single project or program. With the contests, briefings and other ongoing communication tactics, this challenge was effectively overcome. From the initial launch of the campaign, employees at all levels have stayed active and engaged.
The other challenge was to ensure that the outreach to teens would come across in a meaningful way, not in a “corporate” way; therefore, when the teen slogan contest was drawing to a close, the executive judges requested a focus group of teens to narrow the field of possible winning entries before final judging by the executives. The teen focus provided a peer-to-peer perspective for the adult judges to consider in selecting the winners.

MEASUREMENT/EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES / Across all audiences and communication objectives, the campaign made marked progress. The following are specific results for each objective:

Objective No. 1: Raise awareness about medication safety and prescription drug abuse among employees of Cardinal Health by 50 percent by the end of 2009. In response to a survey question in September 2009 asking employees whether their awareness and knowledge about prescription drug abuse had increased, decreased or stayed the same, 76 percent of respondents replied “increased”—beating the goal by more than 25 percent. In addition:
- The internal Medication Safety web page recorded 2,373 hits from 1,720 visitors to its main page alone, as of the beginning of December 2009.
- Out of the Wrong Hands collateral reached more than 30,000 employees at home and again in their workplaces. The collateral cost US$21,689.67, including printing and mailing, which was 13 percent below budget.
- The first two employee briefings on prescription drug abuse were attended by more than 150 employees, with more than 2,000 reading the feature stories and 350 accessing the online video and audio posts.
- More than 1,100 Cardinal Health employees voted for a winning video in the Wexner Center PSA contest.
- More than 1,800 sales, operations and marketing employees heard the keynote address by the speaker from the Partnership for a Drug-Free America. As a result, the National Meeting attendees raised US$34,000 for the Partnership for a Drug-Free America—an amount that was matched by the Cardinal Health Foundation for a total of US$68,000.

Objective No. 2: Develop tactics to specifically reach teens in meaningful ways about the issue of prescription drug abuse among their peers. Two highly successful tactics were completed in 2009:

Teen tactic No. 1: The Teen-to-Teen Slogan Contest for children of employees was a significant success. Cardinal Health received 80 entries from throughout the country, and of those, 20 semifinalists were chosen. The teen focus group and panel of executives chose four finalists and the following two grand prize winners:
- “Generation Rx: Kick the drugs. Life’s worth it” submitted by Brandon Mills, a tenth-grader from Hilliard, Ohio.
- “Prescription Drugs: when sharing definitely isn’t caring!” submitted by Kori Crossno, a tenth-grader from San Marcos, California.

The numbers tell only part of the story. Comments on several of the slogan entries show the real impact:
• “I have witnessed several kids around my school saying they take their parents’ and friends’ prescriptions to get high. My slogan would tell kids to stay off prescription medication.”—Waverly Hall, Georgia, age 17

• “When I came up with my slogan, I was mostly thinking about people I know who have abused prescription drugs, some of them even very close friends, and how it has affected them. I have seen prescription drug abuse completely change people into something unrecognizable from the person I had known and liked. It literally has destroyed one of my friend’s lives.”—Overland Park, Kansas, age 18

• “‘Baked,’ ‘landscaping this weekend,’ terms I hear in the halls at my school. I know about Oxycontin and I worry about its use with or without alcohol by kids my age. Luckily, without alienating myself, I can still associate with these kids, but when the drugs and alcohol appear, I head for home…The first time walking away from the ‘cool’ group was hard, but you’re amazed to later find out the number of friends who walk away as well.”—Charleston, South Carolina, age 16

**Teen tactic No. 2:** The PSA contest in conjunction with the Wexner Center not only successfully engaged teens all across Ohio, but also involved Cardinal Health employees and the larger community:

- The Wexner Center received 70 entries in 2009 for its youth division video contest, compared to about 45 entries in previous years—nearly a 63 percent increase in entries, which they attribute in part to the addition of the Cardinal Health Prescription Drug Abuse PSA Contest.

- The five finalists, before producing their PSA entry, attended an orientation that included an in-depth look at prescription drug abuse among teens.

- The five PSA entries were reviewed by Cardinal Health leadership, voted on by Cardinal Health employees and by viewers of Time Warner Cable’s Local on-demand channel, and supported by administrators from the Wexner Center and the Ohio State University College of Pharmacy. This increased the exposure of the teen prescription drug abuse message to several audiences.

**Objective No. 3:** Collaborate with community organizations to help them raise awareness of prescription drug abuse. During the campaign, Cardinal Health effectively collaborated with the Ohio State University College of Pharmacy, the Wexner Center for the Arts, Time Warner Cable, community pharmacists, Partnership for a Drug-Free America, Ohio Health, and the National Council on Patient Information and Education to raise awareness of prescription drug abuse among all three target audiences. In addition:

- Medication Safety web page: The medication safety page on the public Cardinal Health web site received well over 9,000 views during the 2009 calendar year.

- Medication Disposal Day: Over half a ton (1,212 pounds) of old medicine was received from 368 households in the Columbus area and appropriately disposed of by medical professionals. Approximately 75 employees from Cardinal Health volunteered their time toward the effort.

**Objective No. 4:** Increase awareness among community pharmacists of their role in keeping prescription drugs “out of the wrong hands” and of Cardinal Health’s commitment to support
them in this critical social issue, with a short-term goal of reaching at least 50 percent of Cardinal Health community pharmacist customers by the end of 2009:

- Cardinal Health’s sponsorship of Ray Bullman’s appearances reached more than 1,000 Ohio pharmacists, many of whom are customers, and nearly 100 up-and-coming pharmacists at his Ohio State University presentation.
- More than 3,000 customers who are community pharmacists or pharmacy staff were reached during the Retail Business Conference, where they learned about Cardinal Health’s commitment to fighting prescription drug abuse and to supporting pharmacists’ community outreach efforts. This exceeded the goal to reach 50 percent of 5,000 total community pharmacy customers—reaching 120 percent of the goal. Further, in discussions with participants and in surveys following this conference, customers commended Cardinal Health for proactively addressing this critical issue and were enthusiastic about the company’s desire to support their efforts.
- Based on what Cardinal Health learned to date, the company is piloting programs to support community education through local pharmacists in Ohio, with a rollout through other state pharmacy associations by year end. In addition, they are developing recognition awards for pharmacists who are active participants in raising awareness about prescription drug abuse.

This is only the beginning of the story of Cardinal Health’s dedication to fighting prescription drug diversion and abuse. It’s an ongoing problem, and Cardinal Health has an ongoing commitment to being part of the solution.