

Branding Family medicine Maternity Care- No Logo?

by Milena Forte MD CCFP



Although many family physicians in Canada continue to have thriving obstetrical practices, women may not be aware that family doctors are an option when seeking pregnancy care. With obstetricians often seen as the de-facto providers and the growing popularity of midwives, it is time to think about raising awareness and *branding* family medicine maternity care (FM-MC).

The term *brand* can be used both as a verb and a noun to differentiate one similar product from another. A successful brand confers instant recognition, and often evokes a sense of loyalty in those who consume it or identify with it. But a brand doesn't have to be a thing or a product, it can be a concept. Wikipedia defines a *concept brand* as a brand that is associated with an abstract concept, like "breast cancer awareness" or "environmentalism". FM-MC could be considered a concept brand: one that consumers recognize, identify with and find value in.

The first step in branding is to define a clear *brand identity*. *Brand awareness* is built by disseminating key messages to a target audience and highlighting what the *brand value proposition* is. I.e. what is unique about FM-MC and what added value do we offer? This does not in any way diminish the value of other brands (or providers) of maternity care, but helps us better define for patients why they may choose FM-MC for themselves. In order to define a clear brand identity, we need to define the essence of what FM-MC is. Consultation with Canadian family physicians reveals the following key messages that align with the four principles of family medicine.

FM -MC providers:

1. Are clinically skilled medical professionals who see birth as a natural event
2. Offer comprehensive and continuing care, viewing pregnancy in the context of the whole patient
3. Specialize in creating strong patient-physician relationships while caring for women and their families throughout the life-cycle

Women value choice in maternity care and want to understand the range of options available. But do they know their options? A peek at a popular online pregnancy forum (babycentre.ca) would reveal that perhaps they do not:

"I think if you go with the family doctor option, they can only follow you for a certain amount of weeks and then you would be referred on to an OB. I could be wrong but...I don't think they are trained to deliver babies?"

"Is anyone having a family practice doctor deliver your baby? I actually just learned, a few months ago that they can do that."

It is time for FM-MC to highlight our brand- value proposition. In so doing, we need to consider how to get our message out and who our audience is. If we don't brand ourselves effectively, to patients, learners, hospitals

and government, we risk the continuing trend of losing our "market share", resulting in fewer FP's trained and willing to provide maternity care, less funding for the services we provide and therefore fewer options for our patients.

We must clearly define and actively promote the service we offer and the value we bring to patient care. By providing quality maternity care to women while managing their chronic conditions and understanding their psychosocial needs, we bring value to the patients, families and communities we serve, as well as to the health care system. Our patients know this, we know this, now it's time to spread the word.

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