

Sending the right message on health care reform: the battle for hearts and minds

The ongoing debate about health care reform raises important questions not only about policy but about how and why public support has proven so elusive. This talk focuses on three principles of effective communication drawn from psychology and neuroscience that cut across politics, marketing, and leadership, and how the two sides have fared on these principles in the health care debate of 2009. It suggests that efforts to “sell” health care reform this year have violated virtually every principle of effective messaging, from failing to inoculate against obvious emotion-laden attacks (e.g., “government takeover,” “bureaucrats between you and your doctor”) to failing to tell a coherent narrative about how the system got broken and what that suggests about how it might be fixed. It describes research conducted with a large representative national sample of voters that shows just how much difference effective messaging can make in winning or losing public support for precisely the same policies or principles.