

POSTCARD

Greetings from

Spain

Beyond the Counter: Redefining the Pharmacy Experience

What Spain's model teaches U.S.
marketers about trust and care.

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Postcards from Health: An Introduction

At Omnicom Health, we believe the best insights often come from lived experience. Our new Postcards from Health series invites colleagues around the world to share what healthcare feels like where they live—and what lessons global marketers can take from it.

In this first postcard, **Stephanie Hoeler, SVP, Experience Planner at Wildtype**, reflects on her life in Spain. From the neighborhood farmacia to the U.S. pharmacy aisle, her experiences show how trust, care, and culture shape healthcare in ways marketers can't afford to ignore.



The Spanish Experience

Under the Green Cross

I'll never forget my first time stepping into our neighborhood farmacia here in La Eliana, a town twenty minutes outside of Valencia. I'd been here a few months, my Spanish was still shaky, and I needed something for my son's hives. What I found was a huge departure from the typical U.S. experience of aisles of cough syrups and a distracted cashier waving me to "Aisle 12."

Instead? An intimate experience. A pharmacist greeted me warmly, listened patiently, and, noticing I looked confused, explained in simple Spanish why one option was better for a child his age. No overstuffed shelves, no promotional banners yelling "NEW! IMPROVED!" — no need to wonder if I was making the wrong choice. I remember thinking, *"So this is what it feels like to actually be cared for at a pharmacy."*

Here, pharmacies aren't retail. They're a public service. Regulated by law (Ley 16/199), tied to the population they serve, and owned by pharmacists themselves, not chains. It shows.

"Aquí, la confianza se gana cara a cara." Here, trust is earned face-to-face. I trust my pharmacist Quique (pronounced /'ki.ke/, a nickname for Enrique).





The American Aisle

Contrast that with my memories back in New Jersey: strip-mall pharmacy chains packed with every imaginable product, but with no one to help you make sense of them. Pharmacists working at breakneck speed, shielded behind Plexiglas, trying to keep up.

And of course, thanks to the FDA's 1997 decision to allow DTC advertising, every other commercial telling me to "ask my doctor if [brand] is right for me." But when you finally go to fill that script? Nobody really seems to care if you understand how or why you're taking it.

"Lo barato sale caro," or "The cheap way costs more". This is true in terms of trust, outcomes, and loyalty.

Global Implications

Living here has taught me, in a new and deeper way, what “human-centered” looks like in practice. In Spain, pharmacies are more than a point of sale. They’re a point of connection, a point of counsel and a point of care.

For U.S. healthcare marketers, that difference is a call to action:

Strategic Responses:

- **Sponsor “Counsel-First Pods”** inside U.S. clinics: branded micro-hubs staffed by pharmacists, delivering what patients crave, advice, reassurance, and clarity.
- **Rethink DTC Spend:** Reallocate a portion of media budgets toward trust-building programs—such as pharmacist-led adherence coaching or co-branded education—to capture loyalty instead of just impressions.
- **Reframe the Role of the Pharmacist:** Move beyond viewing pharmacists as dispensers and position them as trusted intermediaries in patient education and adherence.
- **Design for Cultural Context:** Spain proves healthcare doesn’t need to be loud to be effective. Explore quieter, trust-led models: advisory programs, community listening sessions, and education that feels personal, not promotional.
- **Future Signal:** As U.S. patients demand more authenticity, lessons from abroad can future-proof brand strategies and restore trust in healthcare communications.



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About the Author

Stephanie brings 15+ years of global healthcare experience to the Wildtype team. As SVP, Experience Strategy Lead, she works intimately with client teams across time zones in the UK, Zurich, Italy and the US, ensuring strategy and execution align across geographies, regulatory environments, and audience needs.

She's crafted high-impact experiences merging science and storytelling for ASH, ASCO, ESMO, the Society of Surgical Oncology (SSO) and more. At ESMO, she interviewed HCPs from varied regions to inform, and refine, real-time messaging. For Merck at SSO, she hosted a multi-indication, interactive booth presence earning record engagement, setting the bar for future congress.

Stephanie is a budding bilingual with a unique blend of strategic vision, lived global experience, operational discipline, and cross-cultural fluency. One of her superpowers is bringing calm and clarity to the complex. She is a trusted senior partner inspiring big-picture thinking while managing day-to-day execution to drive results.



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