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# 3 Ways to Better Enable your MSLs

## THE CASE FOR CONTEXT

Like every other stakeholder in the healthcare system, medical science liaisons (MSLs) faced upheaval related to the COVID-19 pandemic. As medical practices pivoted to telehealth, MSLs shifted from in-person interactions to virtual sessions with thought leaders (TL). For their commitment and resilience, MSLs deserve kudos. But as the industry continues navigating a “new normal,”

MSLs need a higher level of enablement.

Before the pandemic, MSLs had plenty of opportunities to get to know TLs; even the briefest hallway conversations yielded insights into TLs’ practices and priorities. Lengthier discussions during conferences or outside office hours, provided even more value in helping build knowledge and strengthen the relationship. The pandemic further solidified TLs’ needs for rapid access to scientific information and highlighted the importance of the MSL role and relationships to enable scientific exchanges. However, even though TLs still see great value in their relationships with MSLs, ongoing restrictions have reduced everyone’s ability and time to engage face-to-face.

Given constraints, MSLs and providers will continue to interact largely via digital and virtual channels. For long-established relationships, MSLs can supplement more formal video conferencing meetings and understand providers’ needs and preferences. To support nascent relationships, MSLs need other ways to gather detailed information. They need help in identifying which aspects of the scientific story are most likely to be relevant for each provider, as well as support in connecting each providers’ preferences and priorities to the available scientific and medical affairs resources.

To deliver the greatest value, medical affairs teams should rethink deployment strategies and how they provide strategic and tactical context to the MSL teams. For example, the following investments are great places to start:

**1 Develop TL “dossiers.”** Although customer relationship management systems store important provider and practice details, they can often fall short in properly preparing an MSL for their interactions with TLs. To engage effectively, MSLs need to know each

TLs’ research interests and history, with special emphasis on most recent publications. These details help MSLs understand the mindset and experience a TL brings to their discussions. That, in turn, helps MSLs tailor what they share, how they share it, and when they probe to understand more about the “why” that shapes their perspective.

**2 Illuminate TL networks.** Providers practice as part of formal and informal networks that continually exchange information and serve as trusted advisors to each other. In many cases, these networks include TLs who are highly influential yet “hidden” when compared to the most prominent voices. With access to comprehensive TL maps, MSLs can better understand how each TL fits within a local or regional network. These insights help in preparing for conversations and crafting more tailored messages. Beyond that, TL networks can be leveraged as indirect (yet effective) channels for conveying scientific messages to hard-to-reach providers, and to further disseminate scientific information to providers, who may themselves have less access to their networks via traditional conference interactions due to pandemic-related restrictions and added constraints on the healthcare system.

**3 Link strategy and science.** Having an abundance of scientific and medical affairs resources at an MSL’s disposal can be great – but only if you distill the information to ensure it is highly actionable and communicate it. Be direct regarding the strategic mission, vision, and objectives. With that additional context, MSLs can be more precise about which resource to use, with whom, and when.

Above all, remember that providers overwhelmingly want to engage with MSLs and value their scientific knowledge and expertise. When you enable MSLs with greater context, they can focus where they contribute the greatest value: building and strengthening relationships with TLs, telling personalized, compelling scientific stories, and providing medical insights for the organization.

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