



Expanding Reps' Value through LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

As new technologies emerge, industries often take a good, hard look at how they do business. This has been true in sectors like retail, publishing, and, of course, healthcare. In our industry, companies are exploring the potential of technological advances, such as e-detailing and mobile marketing, at the same time they are downsizing their sales forces. However, healthcare representatives are far from obsolete — to the contrary, their greatest contributions may be yet to come. But to get there, they need opportunities to develop new knowledge and skills.

Field Sales Forces — Still Vital

Some good news: physicians continue to value the knowledge that healthcare representatives provide. Last year, a survey conducted by KRC Research and supported by PhRMA found that more than 90% of physicians interviewed said interactions with representatives allow them to learn about new indications, potential side effects, and the risks and benefits of today's complex medications.

While technology has opened new marketing avenues for biopharmaceutical companies, personal exchanges between physicians and representatives remain an effective — and valued — way to share information. When focused on real clinical issues and grounded in evidence-based information, these two-way dialogues not only complement but also surpass alternative forms of customer communication, such as social media, mobile apps, and other online marketing strategies. The reps' challenge is to be prepared for value-focused discussions that address pharmacoeconomic issues and evidence-based research which is why educational content providers are expanding their offerings in these areas.

Broadening the Knowledge Base

Although physicians say they value interactions with representatives, we know that access continues to be a major challenge. As representatives broaden their knowledge, they also enhance their credibility. Beyond product knowledge, they need to develop business acumen and an awareness of the challenges their



MICHELLE O'CONNOR, President and CEO

customers face on the business side of healthcare. For example, representatives calling on large medical groups and healthcare systems should have a basic understanding of accountable care organizations (ACOs) and how they impact providers. As more physicians and hospitals form networks to care for specific populations — and share potential savings — representatives will need to position product benefits in the broader context of overall disease management and outcomes.

The growing specialization of sales forces takes this idea a step further. Increasingly complex medications, coupled with the rising importance of treatment pathways, require representatives to be knowledgeable beyond the package insert. Clinicians want to interact with representatives who understand the particular disease state, its comorbidities, and therapeutic options. That's why specialty certificates are being developed in areas for which this is particularly important, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes that help representatives build more meaningful relationships with their customers.

Technology Offers Flexibility, New Tools

While technology hasn't diminished the value of representatives, it does offer greater

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flexibility and reduced costs when it comes to training and development, which is why many biopharmaceutical companies are expanding their use of distance learning. Some companies are requiring representatives to complete more online courses while adding their own interactive component. For instance, during a monthly call with district teams, a manager might facilitate discussion and application of a particular online learning module.

Other companies are building continuous learning libraries to enhance their career development programs.

These strategies are being supported by third-party management-level coaching guides and a growing library of independent learning modules across a wide range of topics. Besides greatly reducing travel costs, these strategies keep representatives in the field where they are most valuable.

While technology is making available more flexible learning opportunities, it is also enhancing the representatives' interactions with physicians. Equipped with tablet devices, some representatives complement their discussions with a well-chosen slide or short animation. However, research shows that their success with these tools varies greatly, underscoring the need for training that conveys how to use such technology most effectively.

The bottom line: learning and development organizations still have an enormous amount of work to do. As physicians demand more knowledgeable representatives, the companies that invest in deeper specialization and broader development opportunities will be better positioned to provide the value their customers need and expect. **PV**

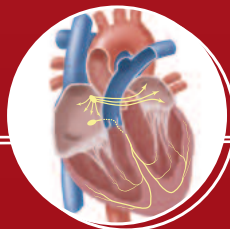
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For more information, Ms. O'Connor can be reached at 800-328-2615 or 540-725-3852, or send an email to moconnor@cmrinstitute.org.

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