

**OPINIONS**

# The Blogging Phenomenon

**B**logs, which often combine a mixture of what is happening in a person's life and what is happening on the Web into a type of hybrid diary/guide site, are quickly becoming important online resources for consumers and patients. Bloggers share personal information with others about their willingness to try certain pharmaceutical products and why they avoid others; they share their personal stories regarding medical treatments. Furthermore, bloggers enjoy freedom of speech. But this information exchange has the potential to influence compliance and alter perceptions about medicines and treatment regimens.

PharmaVOICE asked: What is the potential impact of patient blogging? How is this online exchange altering the perception of pharmaceutical companies, the industry, and its products? And, how, if at all, should the industry react to the blogging phenomenon?

## An opportunity to be embraced

I believe that the pharmaceutical company that embraces the open nature of blogs, especially the facility to openly and instantaneously exchange ideas, will reap rewards in the form of stronger customer relationships, greater therapeutic adherence, and loyalty to its products.

Before there were blogs, message boards and chat rooms provided forums for patients to discuss their actual experiences with drugs. What

blogs have really changed is the scale of this activity, along with increased interest and greater accessibility to unregulated dialogues.

From my position in healthcare communications, it appears that the pharmaceutical industry is every day becoming increasingly cautious with respect to patient communications. This translates into messages that are more tightly tied to indication, avoidance of any unmoderated discussion, and a profound fear of adverse event reporting.

This has the effect of increasing the dichotomy between the "official" messages that patients



hear from the drug manufacturer and the "unofficial" dialogue they read in cyberspace. Is it any surprise that this would spread confusion and increase consumer mistrust?

Because consumers can visit blogs to get unregulated real-life experiences, pharma companies should wake up to the fact that they no longer control this information and, in fact, any attempt to do so will only drive consumers to alternative sources.

But therein lies the opportunity. By embracing and encouraging a dialogue of patient experience and owning up to the full range of therapeutic experiences, pharmaceutical companies can at once leverage the power of the blogosphere, while building trust and transparency.

*Robert Egert*

SENIOR VP, DIRECTOR DIGITAL SERVICES  
XCHANGE

## What's Your Opinion?

### WHO ARE THE MOST INSPIRING PEOPLE IN THE LIFE-SCIENCES INDUSTRY TODAY? THE PHARMAVOICE 100

The August issue of PharmaVOICE will feature 100 of the most inspiring people in the life-sciences industry as determined by the collective participation of you, our readers. This is your opportunity to recognize the people who inspire and motivate you and others; who are having the greatest influence on corporate leadership, research and development, technology, creativity, marketing, strategy, and more; and who are impacting the life-sciences industry through their actions.

These individuals, who can come from any sector, should view industry trends as challenges not burdens, as opportunities not obstacles. They should embody panache and conviction. They should be leaders who plan for the future rather than simply respond to change. They should be innovative creators of out-of-the box and breakthrough strategies, products, and services. They should be pioneering new paths and lifting their companies to new heights.

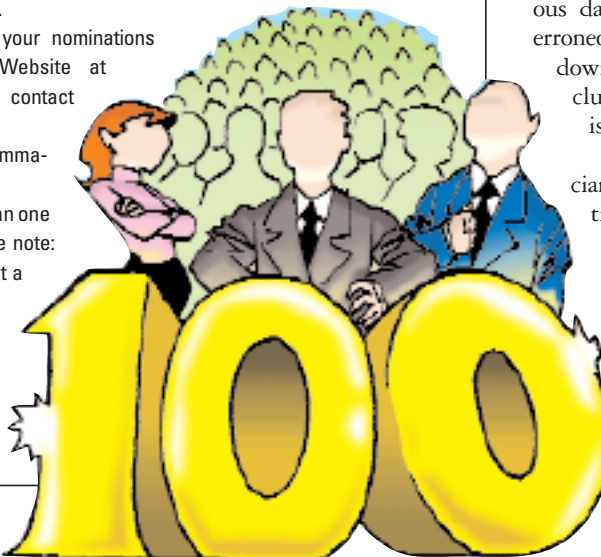
To learn more, review the criteria, or submit your nominations for the PharmaVOICE 100, please visit our Website at <http://www.pharmavoic.com/pharmavoic100.asp> or contact Taren Grom, Editor, at [tgrom@pharmavoic.com](mailto:tgrom@pharmavoic.com).

Nominations need to include a 50- to 200-word summary describing why the individual is an inspiration.

You may submit up to three selections; no more than one nominee can be from your own organization. (Please note: this is not intended to be a popularity contest, nor is it a ranking.)

#### WHAT'S YOUR OPINION?

Alternatively, please e-mail your comments to [feedback@pharmavoic.com](mailto:feedback@pharmavoic.com).



## Bloggers should be held accountable

The blogging phenomenon is interesting. While it allows for the greater diffusion of information, there is no regulatory oversight of the information being diffused. The obvious danger in that is when — sometimes erroneous — information is spread (laying-down a foundation of knowledge) and conclusions are drawn from information that is flawed.

If that information is used by clinicians to treat patients and an adverse reaction occurs, patients could be at risk. Aside from the obvious rationale of treating patients by the most responsible methods, there is no recourse in cases when misinformation is used.

The number of reasons that flawed information could be disseminated are too many to list, but some of the most prevalent are: hear-say (nonfact based) informa-

tion; information skewed to reinforce a position that would produce profit for a group/individual; and information not adequately filtered, losing meaning over several generations of transmission.

In the healthcare and education environments, decisions must be made on the best possible, scientifically based, unbiased data/information; therefore, I believe that there should be regulatory oversight for sources of clinical information.

Blogging provides no such oversight, and so while I do believe that there are permissible and even advantageous (big-picture) venues for blogging, I don't believe that medical information that could impact patient lives (and the lives of all of those with whom they are related) should be part of this venue.

To answer the question: I don't believe that blogging in the pharmaceutical industry should be perpetuated; to do so, would demonstrate a lack of responsibility and integrity on the part of those initiating and supporting the blogging environment.

Bloggers must be held responsible for their actions and their credentials must be known and confirmed; there must be full disclosure of relationships with the medical industry, whatever those relationships might be.

*Beau Chandler*

EDUCATION POLICY & ACCREDITATION  
NATIONAL VA EMPLOYEE EDUCATION  
SYSTEM (EES)  
ORGANIZATIONAL AND PERFORMANCE  
IMPROVEMENT (OPI)

## Impacting trials

Patient blogging, as a Web communication issue, is a potential concern for our industry. In some instances this "tell all" or "share all" communication may accidentally unblind a study or produce some concerns related to safety and efficacy reporting within a clinical-trial protocol.

It is my general feeling that many people communicate thoughtlessly through e-mail and may unwittingly share exaggerated information or totally false information that would end up with regulatory consequences for the clinical trial.

*Deborah Van Cleef*

DIRECTOR DQM RESOURCING & TRAINING  
RESEARCHPOINT

## Blogging, put in perspective

Blogging is very current. It helps satisfy the need for real "live" information on conditions and treatment experience. But it has to be put in perspective. Wise physicians are

already cautioning patients not to believe or take too seriously the "health personals" they read on the Internet, as there is no proof that the information is true.

I think that the real issue is the dearth of direct communication to patients and their families on health issues from credible sources. As the noose tightens on DTC advertising, developing credible DTP e-

information and e-communication becomes critical to counter blogs and to give people information to manage their own or their families' healthcare. Where is Dr.Koop.com when we need it?

*Rita Sweeney*

PRESIDENT

DORLAND GLOBAL HEALTH COMMUNICATIONS

## More on leadership development ...

### Cultivating learning and professional development

Burson-Marsteller takes the process of fostering leaders very seriously and as such has instituted several training programs under the umbrella of B-MU.

B-MU is dedicated to providing unparalleled learning opportunities that enable people to work together across the globe in integrated and culturally synchronous teams to deliver gold-standard performance to our clients. The program nurtures our global culture by offering learning opportunities that enable us to share resources and experiences and to collaborate with colleagues worldwide. We provide an online center for learning that is accessible to each employee and offer learning through a variety of mediums: live, online, and independent study — internal and external courses — structured classroom and non-traditional learning experiences. We recognize individuals' investment in their own careers through learning and factor in their proactive participation in their performance evaluation and planning their career development. We are also fortunate to be able to offer our senior leaders the opportunity to participate in Maestro and Virtuoso, a WPP training program aimed at strengthening the ability of our most senior client leaders to build and lead increasingly large, complex relationships. The program provides participants with an intensive learning experience and the opportunity for highly personalized coaching.

*Ame Wadler*

CHAIRMAN, GLOBAL HEALTHCARE PRACTICE  
BURSON-MARSTELLER

### Leadership is open to all

Our company creates an environment where the opportunity to become a leader is open to everyone regardless of his or her position within the company, if he or she is motivated to be mentored and to learn.

There are, however, two specific developmental commitments that our company's

management has made to the development of future leaders.

The first is that each of our teams has the benefit of a hands-on executive who works with the team to anticipate risks, to evaluate lessons learned, to serve as mentor for client service, and to motivate the internal team.

This gives each team member, whether serving in an administrative or management role on the team, direct access to someone who has established himself or herself in the field as a leader. The role played is one of advisor and consultant, challenging the entire team to work together toward a common goal of excellence.

The second commitment the company has made is to foster an environment where mistakes become part of a constructive and positive learning process.

This frees future leaders to be creative and to explore nontraditional approaches on behalf of our clients. Our motto is to never identify a problem without thinking of a potential solution. Our goal is that our future leaders learn that even mistakes can lead to future success as long as they apply what is learned to their next challenge.

*Carol M. Breslauer, MPH*

VP, OPERATIONS  
RESEARCHPOINT

### Pardon us ...

In the May 2005 article, Complex Challenges, Strong Leaders, the photo of Faith Osborn, Creative Director, NewtonEdge, was actually that of her colleague, Constance Bille, M.Ed. We again congratulate Faith for being named a 2005 HBA Rising Star. To learn more about NewtonEdge and its services, please visit [newtonedge.com](http://newtonedge.com). PharmaVOICE apologizes for the error.

