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5 Motivational Tools for Sites in Medical Liaison Communication in Multinational Multicenter Randomized Clinical Trials

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Letter from Editor

By Cherie Hyder, PharmD, MSL-BC | Summer 2024

Hello Readers!

Welcome to summer heat, vacation plans, and getting outdoors to enjoy the not-so-lazy summer days! This journal edition is jam-packed with a broad array of topics to entertain and inform as you find time to lay back in a hammock, swing, or beach chair!

We are at the midway point in 2024, a year of change where we may not know where the road leads, but we are forging a path together and have no doubt the remainder of this year will deliver success as we tackle important goals! Medical Affairs continues to evolve with a focus on strategy, elevating excellence in all we do, keeping patients at the forefront of why we do what we do each day, and harnessing technology for greater efficiency and prowess with data to better understand and focus on strategic deliverables.

The role of the MSL is not an easy one; we must be smart, savvy, resilient, flexible, productive, strategic, empathic and so much more – all at once – the complete package! I am often asked what skills MSLs need today and going into the future. This question is intriguing because skills come not only from the role defined in a job description but also from behaviors and mindsets that empower us to achieve our absolute best efforts. Behaviors and mindset funnel into skills that deliver value and the actions we take that lead to impact on our goals. This should look like gears turning together in a cycle that feeds back into fine-tuning behaviors and so on.

When thinking about how you want to polish your MSL skill set, reflect on your mindset and behaviors that help you succeed in this vital field role. While one could expand this set of behaviors, I find it most helpful to focus and land on this set as a useful gauge for MSL teams:

1. Are you a strategic partner? How do you balance your / others' needs?
2. Have you earned the trust of internal stakeholders to effectively collaborate?
3. Are you an impactful communicator? How does your communication make a difference?
4. Do you focus on solving issues, problems, and concerns? How do you move everyone toward solutions? Do you guide innovation?
5. Have you mastered the science and demonstrated proficiency with technology that aids efficiencies? How are you staying current with science and technology?

As you read this summer edition of the journal, these key behaviors span across the topics from areas that consider how MSLs enhance productivity and resilience, deliver impact, employ a scientific mindset and healthy habits as well as collaboration, communication, and business acumen. We all come from various backgrounds and experiences in the MSL role and it is no surprise that we find unique ways to capitalize on our expertise. Sharing ideas, best practices and novel approaches allows us to learn together and reach new heights in this fascinating career path we are integrally involved in. After all, everyone here knows that we are so fortunate to be in the BEST position within the industry in Medical Affairs!

Enjoy summer days and before we know it, fall will be here with yet another rich edition for your learning and reading pleasure! Thank you for making time to invest in growth and development through your time to read many great articles contributed by these authors and I hope you will decide to join the author ranks if you have not yet done so! We are eagerly awaiting your contribution to the journal!

Cheers!

About the author:

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Cherie Hyder is a Syndicated National MSL Director at Syneos Health. In her previous job at Biohaven Pharmaceuticals, she supported a virtual launch of Nurtec ODT for acute migraine. She has been involved in drug development for more than 30 years, working at the FDA in CDER and pharmaceutical companies including Pfizer, Lilly, Novartis, Solvay, and Avanir, among others. At the University of Missouri, she received a Doctor of Pharmacy degree with the intention to devote her career to pharmaceutical research. She has multiple adjunct faculty appointments and enjoys teaching opportunities.

Take a Journalistic Approach to Gather Insightful Stories!

By Cherie Hyder, PharmD, MSL-BC | Summer 2024

You jump into KOL scientific exchange with enthusiasm, but after a few attempts, you're feeling a bit disappointed that the insights and patient experience stories are not coming forth….

You chat with KOLs and they give you just one or two-word answers, they just don't seem to have anything interesting to say…

Or you ask a group in your clinical presentation to share their patient experiences and you get awkward silence or blank stares as they shift uncomfortably in their seats…
Perhaps you reach out to a few influential thought leaders but it seems that all they want to do is talk off-topic and do not provide any useful insights…

You repeat your KOL meetings as above and keep getting the same lackluster results, wondering where the elusive insights and truly meaningful patient experience stories are…

…perhaps you think that only a highly experienced MSL can get KOLs to open up in a way that makes interesting dialogue to gather deeper insights and real-world stories. You wonder: do I need to become a NY Times journalist to find these stories and uncover the details that lead to excellent insights?

These are questions field MSLs struggle with as they are pushed ever harder to bring in illuminating insights, help shape medical strategies, and uncover more about the patient journey and disease state conditions. Yes, there are great clinical stories within your grasp and everyone does have a story to tell.

Good stories and insights must be earned! You cannot walk into a KOL meeting and demand insights. You 'earn' stories by having the patience to interview, listen, and encourage dialogue, nurturing the discussion that will lead you to great content for impactful insights and captivating clinical stories. You need to help people trust you before they'll feel comfortable talking to you. Trust is key to earning the information you seek.

And interviews are real conversations; often people won't even know their own stories. They discover their stories by talking to you. You lead the discussion into the storytelling format that allows you to listen fervently and expand your ideas with informative sharing in the cross-talk with your KOL as you guide them into storytelling mode. It's a new experience for KOLs too,

and many will reflect on how you interview them by saying, “I never quite thought about things in the same way before taking the time to tell the complete story to you.” Interview people well and you’ll help them discover more clinical stories that shed light on patient experiences, treatment decisions, and so many useful insights.

I’ve learned there is nothing that people won’t tell you if you ask in a compassionate and legitimately interested approach. MSLs need to employ this strategic tactic for successful interviewing that leads to clinical insights and stories! While we spend time telling stories with clinical data in our scientific exchanges, it is perhaps even more important to learn how to draw out stories from our KOLs and stakeholders which is both a science and an art within the discussion.

Areas to explore with this “journalistic” approach:

1. Why stories are important and how you can use them
2. How to encourage clinical storytelling with your stakeholders
3. How to conduct interviews that will uncover great stories and insights
4. How to use great clinical stories to learn and expand discussions with others (KOLs, stakeholders et al)

Why Do Stories Matter?

Stories bring context to light. They help us think and consider new or additional elements in our understanding to explain experiences more clearly including the science, relationships, emotional states, and memories as well as elevating questions and areas where conflicts exist. Stories teach us about perspectives and experiences from others’ viewpoints. And, sharing stories builds trust; when others trust us with their stories, we begin to deepen relationships, critical to connecting with others. Stories are influential, communicating vision and ways we want to change current circumstances, learning from what is working or not working in the current situation. Stories are engaging and breathe life into the science we all know but need to see from the perspective of patients and the clinicians who treat them. Stories can elevate empathy for others and what they experience, propelling field MSLs and leadership to work toward innovation through research and novel ideas that make a difference. Suffice it to say that stories are quite powerful and they impart passion and purpose into our field activities.

Communication is a two-way street where we not only tell our stories often with clinical data but also seek to encourage others to share their stories in ways that expand our knowledge, understanding, and appreciation for new views, adding deeper insights that shape medical strategies.

Start with Customers you Engage – KOLs, PAGs, Other Stakeholders

One important caveat: an interview for story content is very different from a survey interview. Survey research might require you to ask several questions in a session, but that kills conversation quickly. Do not fall into the situation where you have a string of questions in your agenda and simply ask random questions as if your discussion is a survey. This never works! Think about proactive probing questions you may receive from internal leaders with key areas to explore with thought leaders; how will you weave them into your conversation in a cohesive manner that does not take the form of a survey? Take time to consider which questions matter most with the KOL you will engage and sequence them within a strategic agenda for a nuanced conversation that flows nicely.

For story interviews, you should have 3-4 topics you want to cover. What elements about the patient journey are important to query? Where do we need a deeper understanding of the clinical experience? Ask open-ended questions that people can’t reply ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to – and be prepared to dig into topics using probing and clarifying questions to guide you through the discussion, opening up areas that your KOL or other entity seems really passionate about. Let them lead you to where the real story is.

Once you’ve decided who you need to interview, someone you are engaging with using a strategic agenda approach, you need to interview them in a practical way to get great clinical stories. Remember you could just ask loads of questions and get a lot of material – but that won’t guarantee you’ll get good stories. You need a solid plan!

How to plan interviews

You have to carefully plan and conduct your interviews in order to get the types of useful stories you’ll need. Here are some best practices for planning interviews within your agenda for scientific exchange that yields insights and great stories.

1. Give yourself enough time

There are some key stages in planning:

- Identify the KOLs / stakeholders you need to approach AND the topics you’re going to talk about. You won’t ask

the same questions of every entity; make sure your questions are relevant to each type of KOL you approach. If you're not clear, focused, and concise at this stage, you're going to waste time so planning to get it right is essential. Have a strategic agenda!

- Set aside time to do interviews. Ensure this is built into your agenda plan. Just deciding to do an interview at random in discussions will not produce the results you are looking for.
- Consider using the TED approach; these types of questions help others expand on ideas and experiences that will put them in storytelling mode:
    - Tell me more about…
    - Can you Explain…
    - How do you describe….
    - For example, a thought leader may say: "In my clinical experience, patients prefer using medication reminders." Now add in one of the TED elements: "Tell me more about the medication reminders patients prefer…"
- Maybe they share some information that seems interesting but stop without sharing the details; a little nudge such as "How so?" can extend the discussion. For instance, the stakeholder may say: "The clinical data you shared is not consistent with my patient experiences." Now add in a nudge… "How so?"
- Decide how you're going to collect information – are you taking notes while they talk or downloading after the discussion? Doing both is ideal, as you can reflect on the discussion immediately after and add in more notes. Don't wait to review your notes after an interview; the longer you wait, the more detail and emotion you will forget. Build in time to review your notes directly after that call.
- Have a good idea of the type of content you're looking for based on medical strategy and what your leadership is seeking, what your internal stakeholders are looking for. Are you looking for in-depth clinical stories that will flesh out the patient experience or will you be focusing on probing questions or key topics of interest; are there areas of focus where insights are most needed? Ensure you weave a cohesive approach within the agenda topics to build a seamless dialogue.
- Consider sharing of conversation in your discussion; talking more than the KOLs or stakeholders means you listen less and learn less. Balance how you will share information and keep time as open as possible for others to share information and stories with you.

2. How to make the initial approach to interview prospects

Once you've done your agenda planning, it's time to make the initial approach with scientific exchange. You can't just say "I'm looking for clinical patient stories and your insights", that's too much about you, not something that will persuade someone to give up their valuable time to talk to you. Much better to say, "I am interested in your experience treating patients with condition X; can you share what you find patients struggle with from the initial diagnosis through treatments they try? What do you hear your patients say and share with you?" Any people enjoy talking about themselves. So, make this dialogue about them, not you or your needs.

The traditional approach is to email first, then follow up on replies:

- Keep it short and to the point
    - Grab their attention and interest in the subject line of the email
    - Establish your own credibility (who are you and why are you reaching out)
    - Be clear about exactly what you want them to do and why
- When people do reply, you need to get back to them quickly while they're still hot! Reply within 24 hours and offer a firm time and date to connect. (But things do change, so be prepared to rearrange if they cancel)

3. Get the most from your scientific exchange interview approach

Make sure to minimize time pressure to allow discussion to expand beyond the time allotted if it happens and get yourself into the right frame of mind before you begin the meeting. Going over your questions before you begin the agenda discussion is a must. You might find that visualizing successful KOL discussions you've done in the past might help set the stage for your current meeting. What went well and how did you open up to get the conversation flowing nicely?

- Be bright, confident, and positive right from the start. Remind them who you are and what you are aiming to accomplish.
- Confirm that they're the type of KOL with the information you seek (if they're not, you want to consider whom they could introduce you to to obtain the info and stories you seek.)
- Cover the main points that you absolutely need based on medical strategy focus areas.

- Give the interviewee freedom to talk – but keep the focus on what you need to get – good stories and insights for your strategic imperatives, even if what you get is a little surprising. That can be the best meeting when it turns into insights you do not expect!
- Listen for usable quotes and take good notes. If the KOL shares verbatims from patients such as how they express frustration or concerns, capture their specific words from the HCP perspectives. Don't be afraid to ask people to repeat what they said if you didn't quite take it all in on the first try with your notes. These quotes are useful insights!
- Be engaged and keep it a two-way conversation – you'll get better stories if the interviewee feels like they're talking to a person, not a wall. Keep the banter flowing; use small prods with few words such as "how so, go on, and tell me more about that…."
- Ensure your body language is open; do not cross arms/legs, face the storyteller, and give non-verbal feedback such as some head nods, leaning in, and good eye contact that encourages more open dialogue. Sometimes we forget about how we position ourselves.
- An initial interview is good to start, yet it is vital to further relationship development with follow-up meetings that allow you to keep learning from your KOLs and other stakeholders. If you want more time to explore an issue further, don't be afraid to ask.

4. Be ready for the unexpected

KOL scientific exchange Interviews often do not go exactly to plan – there are both pitfalls and opportunities – here are some short tips!

- Conversations often veer off-course – but sometimes this can lead you in an entirely new direction for a unique clinical story that you hadn't thought of (this might go against our earlier advice to keep focused – but go with your instincts and be opportunistic!)
- You can use an "issue bridge" such as "I am glad you mentioned that; it makes me think of…." And this can help bring you back to your agenda when needed, using a smooth approach.
- An interview can be significantly longer or shorter than what you budgeted time for, so you'll need to respond accordingly. If it's shorter than you expect, be polite, thank the interviewee for their time, and end the meeting if nothing more is needed. If it's longer than you expect and a good interview, do everything you can to keep going – otherwise, you might lose something fantastic. Build buffer time to allow you to stay longer in case the discussion is truly great and you want to keep it going.
- Despite your best efforts to identify key items you need in the KOL discussion, sometimes you don't get anything usable in terms of insights or clinical stories. If that's the case, don't try to force usable content out of a discussion – it just won't be the impactful insights you seek.

Your next step is to get started

You can get all the advice you think you need, and you can review wonderful clinical stories brought in by your fellow MSLs, but the best way you can learn to draw out clinical stories and compelling insights is to get started doing it. You will hone your process with some practice. Storytelling is not just about what MSLs share with others, but rather what we can learn from the stories others share with us to allow us to be more impactful, shaping internal strategies and fostering an evolving understanding of health conditions, patient experiences and what clinicians manage in their daily clinical cases. Together, MSLs make a significant contribution to assimilating a broad array of knowledge through their scientific exchange efforts and translate this body of information into key value that ultimately aims to help the patient. We all love great stories and they are quite memorable! Make sure to encourage others to share their stories and you will not only elevate your relationships but also drive strategies through the powerful stories and insights you bring back to your team and organization!

About the author:

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Cherie Hyder is a Syndicated National MSL Director at Syneos Health. In her previous job at Biohaven Pharmaceuticals, she supported a virtual launch of Nurtec ODT for acute migraine. She has been involved in drug development for more than 30 years, working at the FDA in CDER and pharmaceutical companies including Pfizer, Lilly, Novartis, Solvay, and Avanir, among others. At the University of Missouri, she received a Doctor of Pharmacy degree with the intention to devote her career to pharmaceutical research. She has multiple adjunct faculty appointments and enjoys teaching opportunities.

Proven Strategies From Conducting Gathering Actionable Insights Training Programs with 70+ Companies: Tips for MSLs and MSL Leaders

By Samuel Dyer, PhD | Summer 2024

Medical Science Liaisons (MSLs) are vital to the success of the products they support (1). Gathering actionable insights has become critical for field Medical Affairs, and there is increasing pressure to get it right. In fact, in a 2023 global survey conducted by the Medical Science Liaison Society (MSL Society), 91% of MSLs and MSL leaders shared that “there has been significantly increased pressure on MSLs to gather Actionable Insights from KOLs/HCPs” (2). Over the last few years, the MSL Society has conducted Gathering Actionable Insights training programs with over 70 pharmaceutical, biotechnology, medical device, and diagnostic companies in 15+ countries. Conducting these programs has revealed essential strategies and practical tips to improve this process. The following are some critical issues that must be addressed when gathering meaningful and relevant actionable insights. I will also provide specific recommendations for MSLs and MSL Leaders to address each critical issue.

Clearly Define Actionable Insights

A significant challenge observed is the need for a clear definition of actionable insights. Many teams struggle to define actionable insight for their team. This ambiguity often leads to collecting irrelevant data that does not contribute to strategic decision-making.

Issue: Lack of Definition
MSLs might gather a large volume of data without a precise definition, but only a small portion may be actionable. This inefficiency can result in missed opportunities to influence strategic decisions.

Tip for MSLs: Use Checklists and Guidelines
Develop checklists and key insight questions to assist during engagements with KOLs. These tools can provide a structured approach to gathering data, ensuring that engagements align with the criteria for actionable insights.

Tip for MSL Leaders: Establish a Clear Definition
Work with their team to create a standardized definition of actionable insights. This definition should focus on information

directly impacting the medical strategy, clinical practice, or patient outcomes. For example, actionable insights might include new trends in KOL prescribing behaviors that influence treatment protocols.

Understand the Medical Strategy

A deep understanding of the medical strategy for the products supported is crucial for gathering relevant insights. Multiple surveys conducted by the MSL Society have revealed that many MSLs don't fully understand the medical strategy for the products they support. In fact, a 2024 survey revealed that 57% of MSLs do not have a clear understanding of the medical strategy for the product they support (3). This lack of understanding hinders their ability to recognize and gather relevant insights that support strategic goals.

Issue: Insufficient Knowledge of Medical Strategy
MSLs who don't fully understand the medical strategy for the products they support will struggle to identify relevant insights. As a result, collected and reported information will not support the organization's strategic objectives.

Tip for MSLs: Deep Dive into the Medical Strategy
Frequently discuss the medical strategy and scientific priorities with management to maintain an in-depth understanding. This should include the product's target patient populations, competitive landscape, and relevant clinical data. Regular updates and briefings from medical affairs leadership can help MSLs keep updated about strategic changes.

Tip for MSL Leaders: Align Insights with Strategic Goals
Ensure that the insights collected align with the medical strategy. For instance, if the medical strategy focuses on expanding use in a specific patient demographic, MSLs should prioritize gathering insights related to that group.

Overcome Challenges in Recognizing Actionable Insights

It is critical to identify and overcome the challenges of recognizing actionable insights. Many MSLs have reported needing help understanding the medical strategy for the products they support and recognizing actionable insights.

Issue: Difficulty in Identifying Actionable Insights
MSLs often can't distinguish actionable insights from general information/observations from KOLs due to a lack of clear guidelines on what defines an insight on their team and a lack of insight-gathering training.

Tip for MSLs: Practice and Feedback
Although dreaded by some MSLs, role-playing and feedback sessions can help them sharpen their skills in recognizing actionable insights. This continuous improvement ensures MSLs can effectively discern valuable and relevant information during their engagements with KOLs. It's critical for MSLs to continually demonstrate their ability to interpret and discuss clinical data effectively with KOLs (4).

Tip for MSL Leaders: Provide Clear Definitions and Training
Develop a clear definition of actionable insights, and how they relate to the medical strategy for the product(s) the team supports. Regular training sessions help MSLs stay updated and improve their skills in gathering relevant insights.

Enhance Reporting and Sharing of Insights

After insights are gathered, it is crucial to effectively report and share them within the organization. Many teams struggle to convince internal stakeholders of the value of the insights gathered by MSLs.

Issue: Difficulty in Reporting and Sharing Insights
An effective system for reporting and sharing insights captures valuable information and maximizes its potential impact.

Tip for MSLs: Use Technology for Insight Management
Leverage technology and data analytics tools to streamline the process of gathering, analyzing, and reporting insights. Implementing a centralized system for tracking insights can improve consistency and make it easier to extract actionable information.

Tip for MSL Leaders: Communicate Impact Stories
Consistently communicate to the MSLs on their team the impact of the insights they report. Sharing success stories where insights led to significant strategic decisions can motivate MSLs and reinforce the importance of their work.

Implications of Not Addressing These Issues

Failing to address these critical issues can have significant negative implications. Without clear definitions, MSLs can not gather meaningful and relevant data, which leads to wasted resources and missed strategic opportunities. A lack of understanding of the medical strategy will likely result in MSLs gathering information that does not align with strategic goals, potentially hindering the product's success. Challenges in recognizing and reporting actionable insights can lead to a lack of meaningful data for strategic decision-making, reducing the effectiveness of MSLs. Finally, ineffective reporting and sharing processes can diminish the perceived value of insights gathered by MSLs.

Conclusion

By addressing these critical issues—defining actionable insights, understanding the medical strategy, and recognizing and reporting insights—MSLs can significantly enhance their effectiveness in gathering actionable insights. Based on lessons from over 70 companies, these strategies will help MSLs contribute more effectively to their organization's strategic goals and ultimately improve patient outcomes.
For MSL leaders seeking to enhance their MSL team's skills in gathering actionable insights, the MSL Society offers a unique customized Gathering Actionable Insights training program. The program empowers MSLs with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to excel in identifying, composing, and communicating actionable insights, thereby enhancing their impact on medical strategy and operational excellence. Learn more here:
https://themsls.org/identifying-communicating-kol-insights-training/

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About the author:

Dr. Samuel Dyer
CEO and Chairman of the Board, MSL Society

Dr. Samuel Dyer is the CEO of the Medical Science Liaison Society and has over 24 years of international MSL experience. During his career, he has managed MSL teams and operations in over sixty countries across the United States, Canada, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Australia, and New Zealand. He has facilitated the successful launch of pharmaceutical and medical device products for both Fortune 500 pharmaceutical companies and small biotechnology companies.

Dr. Dyer has coached, interviewed, and reviewed the CVs of countless aspiring MSLs. His insights and guidance have resulted in hundreds of aspiring MSLs successfully breaking into their first roles.

While leading the MSL Society, he has conducted MSL training programs for over 65 pharmaceutical, biotechnology, and medical device companies in more than 15 countries. Dr. Dyer has also written extensively on the Medical Science Liaison profession, including numerous published articles, benchmark studies, and reports. He has been the keynote speaker and moderated numerous international conferences on various MSL–related topics, including creating teams, management, MSL training, proper utilization of MSLs, global trends, and the KPIs and metrics used to measure MSL performance. Dr. Dyer has also served as a

resource and consultant on several MSL–related projects for several organizations, including McKinsey & Company and Bain & Company.

Dr. Dyer has a PhD in Health Sciences from Touro University and is attending medical school at Washington University (Health & Science) School of Medicine. He has a master's degree in Tropical Biology (where he studied in the Amazon) from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and a bachelor's degree in Biology from the University of the State of New York. Dr. Dyer also completed a certificate program for Executive Leadership and Strategy in Pharmaceuticals and Biotechnology at the Harvard Business School.

Dr. Dyer is the author of the multi-award-winning and Amazon #1 Best Seller "The Medical Science Liaison Career Guide: How to Break into Your First Role." The book is the first and only step-by-step guide on how to break into the MSL career (www.themslbook.com).

MSL & MSL Leader Salary Trends: A Detailed Five-Year (2019-2023) Analysis

By Samuel Dyer, PhD | Summer 2024

Introduction

Transparent salary data and access to it are crucial for maintaining fair and competitive compensation practices within the Medical Science Liaison (MSL) profession. This article offers an unprecedented review of base salary trends with a detailed five-year analysis of salary data for MSLs and MSL leaders, utilizing data collected from annual salary surveys conducted by the Medical Science Liaison Society (MSL Society) from respondents in the USA (1,2,3,4,5). Since 2014, the MSL Society has conducted an annual global salary survey, creating the largest and most comprehensive database of MSL and MSL leader salary information in the world.

Understanding these trends is beneficial for several reasons. For applicants, transparency provides the necessary information to make informed career decisions and the ability to negotiate competitive offers if necessary (6,7). Salary transparency can help close gender pay gaps and promote equity and fair pay. For hiring managers, knowledge of these trends ensures they can offer competitive compensation packages, which are vital for attracting and retaining top talent. In fact, this data is so essential that the majority (61%) of MSL leaders in the USA utilize the MSL Society's annual MSL Salary & Compensation Survey as part of their salary benchmarking process, making it an essential tool for recruitment efforts (5). For HR professionals, access to this comprehensive data allows organizations to align their compensation strategies with industry standards, promoting job satisfaction and likely reducing turnover. This data also provides a foundation for advocating better compensation structures and professional growth opportunities.

MSL Base Salary Trends and Increases (2019-2023)

The table below highlights the base salary trends for MSLs over a 5-year period, segmented by years of experience. The table displays the average base salaries for each year from 2019 to 2023, the total increase in base salary over this period, and the percentage increase.

Experience	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Salary Increase over 5 Years	% Increase over 5 Years
Less than 1 year	$ 144,284.00	$ 152,431.00	$ 157,482.00	$ 160,731.00	$ 166,659.00	$ 22,375.00	15.51%
1-2 years	$ 152,612.00	$ 156,895.00	$ 164,555.00	$ 170,010.00	$ 173,831.00	$ 21,219.00	13.90%
3-4 years	$ 167,746.00	$ 173,173.00	$ 175,541.00	$ 185,115.00	$ 188,481.00	$ 20,735.00	12.36%
5-6 years	$ 175,519.00	$ 179,842.00	$ 189,504.00	$ 193,903.00	$ 202,723.00	$ 27,204.00	15.50%
7-8 years	$ 181,133.00	$ 187,000.00	$ 189,450.00	$ 204,972.00	$ 208,319.00	$ 27,186.00	15.01%
9-10 years	$ 186,486.00	$ 184,741.00	$ 191,680.00	$ 191,783.00	$ 215,700.00	$ 29,214.00	15.67%
11-15 years	$ 194,011.00	$ 196,434.00	$ 197,250.00	$ 211,702.00	$ 218,089.00	$ 24,078.00	12.41%
More than 15 Years	$ 199,029.00	$ 198,190.00	$ 212,959.00	$ 213,509.00	$ 221,687.00	$ 22,658.00	11.38%
Mean	$ 167,192.00	$ 170,080.00	$ 175,066.00	$ 182,239.00	$ 192,454.00	$ 25,262.00	15.11%

Figure 1. MSL Base Salaries

Key Trends:

- Significant Increase: The most notable base salary increase over the 5-year period was for MSLs with 9-10 years of experience, which increased by $29,214.
- Consistent Growth: All MSL experience levels had steady base salary increases, with the average base salary rising by $25,262 over the five years.
- Highest Salaries: MSLs with more than 15 years of experience consistently earned the highest base salaries, reaching $221,687 in 2023.
- Entry-Level Growth: The base salaries for new MSLs (less than 1 year) increased significantly by $22,375 or 15.51%.
- Significant Percentage Increase: The most significant percentage increase over the 5 years was for MSLs with 9-10 years of experience (15.67%).
- Overall Trends: The mean base salary increased by $25,262, or 15.11%, over the five-year period.

Importance and Impact

Aspiring MSLs (Those Trying to Break into the Profession)
– Importance: Aspiring MSLs can use this data to understand the profession's current base salary data to set realistic compensation expectations.
– Impact: This knowledge helps them prepare for interviews and negotiations, ensuring they can negotiate competitive starting salaries and recognize fair offers.

Experienced MSLs Transitioning to New Roles
– Importance: Experienced MSLs can leverage this data to evaluate whether they are fairly compensated and understand the financial benefits of transitioning to new roles.
– Impact: This information supports informed decision-making regarding career moves and ensures that experienced MSLs can negotiate salaries that reflect their expertise and market value.

Current MSLs
– Importance: Current MSLs can utilize this data to understand how their compensation compares to others in the profession and plan for potential salary growth within their organization.
– Impact: This knowledge aids in setting realistic compensation goals and expectations, allowing MSLs to make informed decisions about their professional development and potential financial rewards.

MSL Leaders
– Importance: MSL Leaders can leverage this information to ensure competitive base salaries for their teams, which is crucial for retention and motivation.
– Impact: It helps leaders advocate for better compensation packages and provides a basis for making informed decisions about their team's salary adjustments and career development plans.

HR Professionals
– Importance: Human Resource professionals can utilize this data to benchmark salaries, develop competitive compensation packages, and maintain equity within their organizations.
– Impact: This helps attract and retain top talent, ensuring their compensation strategies align with industry trends and standards, promoting overall job satisfaction and reducing turnover.

Recruiters of MSLs
– Importance: Recruiters can use these salary trends to guide candidates about current market conditions and competitive salaries.
– Impact: This ensures that offers are attractive and competitive, helping to place the best candidates in suitable roles and facilitating successful recruitment processes.

MSL Leaders Base Salary Trends and Increases (2019-2023)
The table below highlights the base salary trends for MSL Managers and Directors over a 5-year period, segmented by years of experience. The table displays the average base salaries for each year from 2019 to 2023, the total increase in base salary over this period, and the percentage increase.

Experience	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Salary Increase over 5 Years	% Increase over 5 Years
Less than 1 year	$ 195,500.00	$ 198,200.00	$ 203,000.00	$ 215,333.00	$ 229,313.00	$ 33,813.00	17.30%
1-2 years	$ 198,529.00	$ 212,619.00	$ 193,143.00	$ 208,136.00	$ 225,727.00	$ 27,198.00	13.70%
3-4 years	$ 193,250.00	$ 215,429.00	$ 204,152.00	$ 221,042.00	$ 236,355.00	$ 43,105.00	22.31%
5-6 years	$ 204,565.00	$ 205,303.00	$ 213,897.00	$ 214,000.00	$ 239,903.00	$ 35,338.00	17.27%
7-8 years	$ 214,700.00	$ 217,833.00	$ 220,733.00	$ 229,273.00	$ 245,292.00	$ 30,592.00	14.25%
9-10 years	$ 210,500.00	$ 222,429.00	$ 222,400.00	$ 226,556.00	$ 250,200.00	$ 39,700.00	18.86%
11-15 years	$ 223,087.00	$ 230,190.00	$ 228,211.00	$ 246,640.00	$ 266,826.00	$ 43,739.00	19.61%
More than 15 Years	$ 232,500.00	$ 240,872.00	$ 238,719.00	$ 249,515.00	$ 257,816.00	$ 25,316.00	10.89%
Mean	$ 213,682.00	$ 222,422.00	$ 221,230.00	$ 232,288.00	$ 243,867.00	$ 30,185.00	14.13%

Figure 2. MSL Leader Base Salaries

Key Trends:
– Significant Increase: The most notable salary increase over the 5-year period was for MSL leaders with 3-4 years of experience, which increased by $43,105.
– Consistent Growth: All MSL leader experience levels had steady base salary increases, with the average base salary rising by $30,185 over the five years.
– Highest Salaries: MSL leaders with more than 15 years of experience consistently earned the base highest salaries, reaching $257,816 in 2023.
– Entry-Level Growth: The base salaries for new MSL leaders (less than 1 year) increased significantly by $33,813 or 17.30%.
– Significant Percentage Increase: The most significant percentage increase over the 5 years was for MSL leaders with 3-4 years of experience (22.31%).
– Overall Trends: The mean base salary increased by $30,185, or 14.13%, over the five-year period.

Importance and Impact

Current MSLs Aspiring to Become MSL Leaders:
– Importance: Current MSLs who aspire to move into leadership roles can utilize this data to understand the financial benefits and salary progression associated with these positions.
– Impact: This knowledge helps them set realistic career goals and expectations, making informed decisions about their career progression and the potential financial rewards of pursuing leadership roles.

MSL Leaders
– Importance: MSL leaders can utilize this data to understand their current base salary relative to industry standards, which is crucial for their career growth and job satisfaction.
– Impact: This information allows MSL leaders to negotiate fair compensation, empowering them to secure salaries that reflect their expertise and the value they bring to their organizations.

HR Professionals
– Importance: HR professionals can utilize this data to accurately benchmark MSL leadership base salaries, ensuring that compensation packages are competitive and equitable across the organization.
– Impact: This helps maintain fairness and transparency within the organization, promotes job satisfaction among MSL leaders, and reduces turnover.

Recruiters of MSL Leaders
– Importance: Recruiters can use these salary trends to provide accurate and competitive salary information to potential MSL

leader candidates.
– Impact: This ensures that salary offers are attractive and competitive, helping to place the best candidates for leadership roles and facilitating successful recruitment outcomes.

Conclusion
This comprehensive analysis of the last five years of MSL and MSL leader base salary data highlights significant growth across all experience levels. This analysis was conducted by utilizing the largest MSL and MSL leader salary database globally. This analysis provides valuable insights into base salary trends and changes over time. Understanding these trends is important and impactful for aspiring MSLs, MSLs, aspiring MSL leaders, MSL leaders, HR professionals, and recruiters. This data helps set realistic salary expectations, ensures competitive compensation packages, and supports informed decision-making for professional development and organizational growth.

The MSL Society's annual salary and compensation survey is an indispensable tool for benchmarking and advancing the profession, promoting fairness, equity, and satisfaction within the MSL community. The significant base salary increase over time reflects the recognition of the vital contributions that MSLs and MSL leaders make to the success of their companies.

For those interested in learning more about MSL salary trends and compensation data, all previous years' salary reports are available for download on the MSL Society website for Professional-level members. To access the full reports utilized in this analysis, including the 2023 reports, which include 10 country-level reports, a global report, and 1,405 slides of data, become a member of the MSL Society (https://members.themsls.org/page/joinnow).

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About the author:

Dr. Samuel Dyer
CEO and Chairman of the Board, MSL Society

Dr. Samuel Dyer is the CEO of the Medical Science Liaison Society and has over 24 years of international MSL experience. During his career, he has managed MSL teams and operations in over sixty countries across the United States, Canada, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Australia, and New Zealand. He has facilitated the successful launch of pharmaceutical and medical device

products for both Fortune 500 pharmaceutical companies and small biotechnology companies.

Dr. Dyer has coached, interviewed, and reviewed the CVs of countless aspiring MSLs. His insights and guidance have resulted in hundreds of aspiring MSLs successfully breaking into their first roles.

While leading the MSL Society, he has conducted MSL training programs for over 65 pharmaceutical, biotechnology, and medical device companies in more than 15 countries. Dr. Dyer has also written extensively on the Medical Science Liaison profession, including numerous published articles, benchmark studies, and reports. He has been the keynote speaker and moderated numerous international conferences on various MSL–related topics, including creating teams, management, MSL training, proper utilization of MSLs, global trends, and the KPIs and metrics used to measure MSL performance. Dr. Dyer has also served as a resource and consultant on several MSL–related projects for several organizations, including McKinsey & Company and Bain & Company.

Dr. Dyer has a PhD in Health Sciences from Touro University and is attending medical school at Washington University (Health & Science) School of Medicine. He has a master's degree in Tropical Biology (where he studied in the Amazon) from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and a bachelor's degree in Biology from the University of the State of New York. Dr. Dyer also completed a certificate program for Executive Leadership and Strategy in Pharmaceuticals and Biotechnology at the Harvard Business School.

Dr. Dyer is the author of the multi-award-winning and Amazon #1 Best Seller "The Medical Science Liaison Career Guide: How to Break into Your First Role." The book is the first and only step-by-step guide on how to break into the MSL career (www.themslbook.com).

How is Being in Field Medical Similar to Being in the US Army?

By Scott Flanders PhD | Summer 2024

A View from a retired US Army Captain, Field Medical Leadership and ChatGPT

Explaining what a Medical Science Liaison does is not easy. No standard answer exists for good reason, the roles are often similar but can vary from company to company, it can change across a product or company life cycle. Even within the same company, 2 MSLs can perform the role effectively (or ineffectively) in very different ways. Finding the perfect explanation can be tricky and might come from unlikely places. Let me try to explain.

At a National Meeting, my team and I had the opportunity to hear a presentation from my colleague, Scott Flanders, PhD., a US Army Captain (Ret) (thank you for your service Scott!). Scott was the Senior Director of Health Economics and Outcomes Research (HEOR) at the time.

The topic was broad – how MSLs can and should be paying attention to the value of medicine, the policies and reimbursement related to our industry and how MSLs are in a unique position to engage in dialogue "beyond the pill" and "beyond the disease state". As I predicted, Scott was brilliant in expanding the mindset of our MSL team. What I didn't anticipate was the last part of his presentation which compared being an MSL to being a US Army Pathfinder. My immediate thought was "Oh boy, where is this going?"

So, what is a US Army Pathfinder? Pathfinders, according to WIKIPEDIA, complete intense course work and field training to navigate operations behind enemy lines to coordinate drop and landing zones for airborne and assault missions. In essence, they are the 1st "boots on the ground" to learn the landscape of unfamiliar territory to prepare the territory for those that follow.

As Scott continued, I began to think, "OK, I can see where Scott is taking this". As I looked around the room at the Field Medical team, I could see them connecting the dots as well. MSLs do play a similar role in Pharma. We are often 1st boots on the ground and prepare the company in several ways – product launch planning, understanding the patient journey, finding unmet medical needs, and preparing the organization for known and frequently unknown challenges by gathering and sharing insights. Brilliant.

Fast forward several years to just a few weeks ago, I was working with Jim Siano, Ph.D., and a current colleague. We were

working together on Field Medical launch preparation, critical success factors, metrics of our success, and scientific narratives to ready our team and the organization for launch of a new product in a new therapy area. I relayed to Jim the Pathfinder story Dr. Flanders shared with my team many years ago. Jim really liked the comparison and took the analogy one step further – he decided to ask CHAT GPT the following question…

"HOW ARE US ARMY PATHFINDERS AND MEDICAL SCIENCE LIAISONS ALIKE"

Both US Army Pathfinders and Medical Science Liaisons rely heavily on intelligence and insights to accomplish their respective missions. Pathfinders must gather and analyze intelligence on enemy movements, terrain features, and other factors that could impact their operations. This information allows them to make informed decisions about route selection, drop zones, potential threats, maximizing the chances of mission success while minimizing risks to themselves and their fellow soldiers.

Similarly, MSLs collect and interpret data on healthcare trends, competitor products, and scientific developments relevant to new drug launches. This intelligence enables them to tailor communication strategies, identify key opinion leaders, and address potential challenges in the marketplace, ultimately driving the successful adoption of the drug by healthcare professionals and patients. In both cases, the ability to gather, analyze and leverage intelligence and insights is crucial for achieving objectives and overcoming obstacles in dynamic and complex environments.

ChatGPT April, 2024

This response Jim obtained was so accurate and beyond what Dr. Flanders and I could have ever expected.

Like those original Pathfinders, MSLs must navigate an "unknown and changing" landscape everyday (sometimes in the worst conditions) to prepare the broader organization for success, to find a path forward and complete the mission. They see the front lines before everyone else does. They see the path before everyone else.

Armed with this information, I will no longer nervously answer the question at a Holiday gathering or in a social setting "what is it that MSLs do anyway?

My answer is now clearer, being an MSL is a lot like being a Pathfinder. 1st on the ground, we gather scientific intelligence and insights, we minimize risk and maximizing the chance of mission success. We pave the path for those that follow using our scientific and clinical expertise to prepare the organization for success. Most importantly, we anticipate and address potential challenges that Health Care Providers may face towards our shared critical mission of caring for and improving the care of patients.

We are Pathfinders.

About the authors:

Paul Ward

Paul is currently the Executive Director of Field Medical at BeiGene, including Solid Tumor, Hematology and FHEOR. He is passionate about bringing needed therapies to patients afflicted with Cancer, helping reshape medical practice, and aligning field and headquarters strategy in a way that brings forward the incredible value Field Medical professionals bring to the many

healthcare providers and internal stakeholders we touch.

Paul joined the industry in 1988 and has been working in Medical Affairs beginning at Lilly Oncology as a Regional Research Manager in Oncology. He has since worked in various leadership roles in a Medical Affairs at Cell Pathways, AbbVie Oncology, Pharmacyclics, and Astellas, and National Liaison Leader for the Hematology and Oncology MSL teams at AstraZeneca.

Paul is an Advisory Board member for the MSL Society and a frequent speaker at Field Medical Symposium and podcasts related to all things Field Medical

Scott Flanders, PhD

Scott Flanders, PhD, is currently Executive Director, Medical Strategy – Oncology, with Sumitomo Pharmaceutical America, Inc. Dr. Flanders has 28 years of Medical Affairs experience across multiple therapeutic areas and has held individual contributor and leadership positions at Myovant Sciences, Dendreon, Astellas Pharma, Takeda Pharmaceuticals, Janssen, and TAP Pharmaceuticals. He earned his Doctor of Philosophy degree in Health Services Research (Economics) from Saint Louis University, and both a Master of Science degree in Health Care Administration and a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration (Finance) from Trinity University (Texas). Scott is also 3rd generation military service member, serving 8 years as a Captain in the United States Army, Adjutant General's Corps. Scott enjoys playing golf and attending live music events when he is not working to improve the lives of patients living with their diseases and conditions. Scott is the proud father of 2 boys and lives in Las Vegas, NV with his wife and 2 dogs.

James Siano PhD, MBA

Jim is currently a Sr. Regional Director, US Field Medical at BeiGene. He is a seasoned BioPharma leader with years of experience driving innovation and patient-centricity across the industry. Throughout his career, he has consistently bridged the gap between strategy, capabilities, and talent to enable organizational solutions that ultimately improve lives. Jim's expertise spans strategic planning, operational excellence, research partnerships, communication, team leadership, and scientific storytelling. He is a passionate advocate for empowered teams and leverages his diverse background from management consulting to navigate complex challenges and unlock the full potential of both individuals and organizations.

Subscription KOL Databases in (Field) Medical: “Status Quo” and “What’s Next”?

By Marcus West | Summer 2024

The year 2020 marked a turning point for the KOL Mapping business in Life Sciences. Until then KOL Mapping was typically a lengthy and costly undertaking for Medical Affairs based on bespoke research projects with specialized service providers.

With the rapid developments in big data processing and analytics, as well as AI/ML/NLP technology, this has changed completely. Companies like Monocl, H1 or Veeva have embraced the technological opportunities and developed syndicated KOL databases covering millions of HCPs/KOLs globally across all therapeutic areas.

Subscription models for pharma customers with immediate access to real/near-time updated KOL profiles for all relevant therapeutic areas eliminated the need to run custom KOL research projects and wait weeks for the results, all relevant KOL information all of a sudden was readily available at the users´ fingertips.

Investors and service providers got excited:

- PE company Inflexion completed the buyout of US based Pharmaspectra in 2019
- US based H1 closed a Series B round with $58M end of 2020
- Swedish company Monocl was acquired by US based Definitive Healthcare in 2020
- Veeva Systems launched Veeva Link Oncology in 2020

A few years later KOL subscription databases have been implemented broadly by the pharmaceutical industry beyond the early adopters. What are the key learnings?
In order to understand the market dynamics and customer value created for the different Pharma user groups from KOL data subscriptions let’s define the standard KOL Data use cases:

Strategic use case:

Typically a one-off requirement in Medical Affairs, drug is in Phase II/III, the indication is new to the company and MedAffairs need to get a more detailed overview of the KOL landscape in a country, region or globally, very often to identify KOLs for an Advisory Board.

Tactic use case:

Drug is pre-launch or already launched and MSLs and other functions regularly engaging with KOLs want to stay informed about scientific activities of the KOLs they work with.
The customer value a syndicated, big data subscription KOL offering can create in a strategic use case situation compared to the custom approach is limited. The information need can be defined as:

- not time sensitive
- highly specific
- typically not recurring

…the opposite of the subscription KOL data product attributes:

Readily available information on a large number of HCPs which is regularly updated

In addition in can be quite difficult to find the right individuals in a database with millions of HCPs:

1. The business requirements need to be translated in an “Archetype KOL Profile” and a “Targeted Search Strategy”
2. The filters in the KOL database need to allow for very detailed searches and users must be well trained to be able to successfully work in the database and find the right HCPs

To illustrate the two points above here is a tangible case study:

A national MedAffairs Manager wanted to identify established KOLs for an Advisory Board to help with the product

positioning strategy.

That's a very common business need, so how does that translate into a target KOL profile and the related search criteria?

If as a MedAffairs Manager you are not super experienced in KOL research you might find this task not easy and even if you have managed to translate your business need in a targeted search strategy, you still need to find the right individuals in the subscription database which can be a challenge if you are only using it once in a while and you are not super familiar with the different filters and search technology.

In addition a good enough country and indication coverage as well as overall data quality (name matching accuracy, included data sources etc.) of the KOL database is crucial.
So from a "Strategic use case" perspective the value aspect of a subscription KOL database is not super compelling for the typical MedAffairs user.

The "Tactic use case" is more favourable for the syndicated subscription products. Having an (ideally CRM integrated) source of information for the scientific activities of KOLs a company is engaging with, can be a huge productivity lever. MSLs for example do not need to spend time searching for recent publications etc. in preparation for a KOL meeting, they have all this information readily available at their fingertips and can have better informed engagements with their KOLs.

From an ROI perspective however this benefit is hard to quantify. Yes, there is research on how many hours per week MSLs google KOL information on the web and this time can be saved, but that's only a "theoretical" value. In reality it is very difficult to determine the magnitude of value generation (apart from potential cost savings and provider standardization benefits in the procurement process) from an enterprise license for a therapeutic area or x amount of subscription database seats on the user side.

So, if

• the ROI is difficult to assess, particularly for the "Tactic use case" scenario
• there is only limited value in the "Strategic use cases"

What can be done from an enterprise perspective to scale and maintain user adoption (main KPI for a successful KOL data subscription roll-out) after the initial excitement following the launch of a KOL data subscription?

Here are 3 practical tips:

1. Enrich KOL Profiles with customer proprietary information to create user value beyond syndicated profile data
2. Integrate KOL Platform in standard workflows/systems to minimize operational burden for the users
3. Introduce PUSH alerts/mails/notifications/newsletters to keep the service top of mind

The technological foundation for enterprise wide, up to date KOL information is there; the next challenge is to tap the full potential of these platforms by driving adoption across all relevant user groups and use cases.

About the author:

Marcus Bergler is a globally recognized thought leader in KOL Identification, Profiling, and Network Mapping.

Before joining D2L Pharma Research Solutions as Global Vice President of Sales and Strategy in November 2017 he served as General Manager Europe for Veeva's KOL business unit (now Veeva Link) after Veeva's acquisition of Qforma's/Mederi's Global KOL business in 2014 where he was also responsible for the EU KOL and Targeting business. Prior to joining Qforma in August 2013, he was VP Sales and Marketing at Cegedim Customer Information (CCI) providing nomination-based KOL Identification and Network Mapping to major life sciences customers.

Before he accepted the CCI assignment in March 2010, Marcus held positions as Consulting Principal and Sales Team Leader at IMS Health, Germany. From January 2003 until December 2006 Marcus was responsible for the business development of Rogers Medical Intelligence Solutions, New York (now Pharmaspectra) in the German market and for selected headquarter clients, providing innovative competitive intelligence and medical education services to pharmaceutical companies.

Prior to that Marcus gained consulting experience of 10 years in the healthcare/pharmaceutical industry. Marcus holds a degree in Economics from Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich.

Best Practices and Lessons Learned as Sanofi Specialty Care Field Medical Scientific Associate Director of Training

By Rebecca Call, PharmD | Summer 2024

Because medical science liaisons require a unique combination of scientific expertise and soft skills to successfully interact with key opinion leaders, the effectiveness of MSL on-boarding and team development is a perennial topic of interest. I have been an MSL at Sanofi since 2018 and took on one of the two hybrid MSL/field trainer positions on my team in 2021. This hybrid role could also be viewed as a best practice, as it affords my counterpart and me the opportunity to keep our finger on the pulse of MSL needs and desires through continued KOL engagement and other MSL responsibilities.

Additionally, this role also allowed me to join and, in 2023, lead an internal group of field trainers from across Sanofi specialty care. This group meets virtually every month and has also held a full-day live meeting in 2022 and 2023. I believe that the best practices and lessons learned from my own experience as a trainer and from my colleagues in other therapeutic areas would be of use for anyone involved in MSL team development.

At the last live meeting in 2023, all eleven attendees completed a survey to characterize their teams' approach to training and their own work as trainers. Regarding on-boarding, all trainers were involved in MSL certification. Most were also involved in MSL skills/soft skills training, disease state training, creating or maintaining a training schedule, and field readiness (Fig 1). The MSL on-boarding period generally lasted three to four months. MSL certification generally consisted of presenting a slide deck, a question-and-answer session and/or roleplay scenarios.

Figure 1: Sanofi Specialty Care Trainer On-Boarding Responsibilities

It is also interesting to note that the group was divided as to whether “MSL certification” was the same thing as “field readiness.” For instance, some teams used certification to confirm that the MSL-in-training had gained adequate disease-state and product expertise, after which they would complete a series of field shadowing visits to learn more about soft skills and compliance rules. By contrast, other teams included field shadowing opportunities and MSL skills training alongside disease state and product training, meaning that certification at the end of training was the last barrier before the MSL could work independently in the field.

Speaking of surveys and MSL skills, one process implemented on my team has been to meet with each newly certified MSL to gather feedback on the on-boarding curriculum and ideas on future team development. So far, thirty-one MSLs have been surveyed, resulting in action items reported to the leadership team at least twice a year. This feedback has led to new initiatives such as recording a five-part podcast series on best practices when attending a medical congress and tweaking the curriculum by aligning the pre-work for didactic training and incorporating more verbalization sessions across different disease-states.

Most significantly, repeated feedback requesting more soft skills training led to the development and implementation of an “MSL Skills” curriculum, a bi-weekly series drawn mainly from one-off workshops previously completed with the team at live meetings. The full curriculum is outlined in Table 1 and emphasizes active learning, including breakout groups, role playing, or games. The curriculum was also designed to be both relevant and timely. For instance, the first session focuses on what the MSL-in-training would need to know before shadowing with certified MSLs in the field. Additionally, several key documents are reviewed including targeted topics, which are approved critical questions to ask KOLs that are aligned with the yearly medical objectives, as well as the Sanofi handbook for medical and clinical personnel and the technology guide for various systems including Veeva, the customer relationship management tool at Sanofi. All members of the first class of MSLs who attended the MSL Skills series were polled after completion. Feedback was positive, with suggestions for future topics or the opportunity for MSLs to attend again if requested.

Table 1: Rare Disease MSL Skills Curriculum

Session	Topic
1	Field mentor and mentee guides, Field shadowing log, Field shadowing schedule
2	Pre-visit planning workshop
3	Preparation for MSL certification roleplays, Targeted topics
4	KOL visit roleplay workshop
5	Clinical insight workshop, “Medical information request or not” game
6	Veeva technology guide, Medical and clinical personnel handbook
7	Rules around proactive materials, Pipeline review

To conclude, MSL training is a complicated process that varies widely between teams and encompasses everything from on-boarding, to certification, to on-going team development. However, MSL team trainers can benefit from receiving feedback both from their team and from trainers across their business or even from other companies to learn about best practices. Just as personalized medicine has become a hot topic across the pharmaceutical industry, personalized MSL training can benefit teams and lead to the creation of new, useful initiatives that enhance team learning and effectiveness.

About the author:

Rebecca M. Call, PharmD

Rebecca Call is a Field Medical Science Associate Director – Training on the Sanofi US Medical Affairs Rare Diseases team. She joined Sanofi in 2016 as a PharmD fellow, completing a two-year postdoctoral program, and ultimately joining her team as a medical science liaison in the Mid-Atlantic region in 2018. She has been in her hybrid training role since 2021. She remains committed to supporting the fellowship program on her team, becoming a fellowship preceptor in 2018 and fellowship program director in 2024. Her work allows her to focus on her passions within medical affairs, including developing and maintaining relationships with external stakeholders as well as supporting adult learning and up-skilling on her team. She is based in Richmond, VA and enjoys cooking, hiking and international travel.

How the Competing Values Framework (CVF) Can Help MSLs Understand Corporate Culture and Succeed

By Eyitayo Fakunle, PhD, MPH, MBA, MSL-BC | Summer 2024

To succeed and find fulfillment in the biopharmaceutical industry, medical science liaisons (MSLs) need more than scientific know-how. They also require essential interpersonal skills like emotional intelligence and navigating corporate culture. One invaluable tool for grasping these cultures is the Competing Values Framework (CVF) [1, 2].

My first encounter with the CVF was during my master's in business administration program, during a course on Organizational Behavior. It was eye-opening, offering a structured yet adaptable way to comprehend the intricate world of corporate culture. The CVF breaks down cultures into four main types—Clan, Adhocracy, Market, and Hierarchy. It's like a roadmap helping us understand where organizations focus (internally or externally) and how they're structured (stable or flexible). Clan cultures emphasize teamwork, adhocracy encourages innovation, market cultures thrive on competition and results, and hierarchy prioritizes order and efficiency. While organizations may display traits of multiple cultural models, one usually dominates. Additionally, as organizations evolve, there might be a noticeable shift towards a different cultural type, reflecting changes in strategic focus or market conditions. During our course, we completed a competing values cultural assessment for a current or previous company, evaluating how our values aligned with the organization amidst organizational change and growth [3-5].

In our roles as MSLs, understanding where our organization—or the one we're engaging with—falls on the CVF map can be highly enlightening. MSLs can leverage cultural strengths to tailor their strategies, collaborate with colleagues, and tackle potential obstacles. Moreover, a deep understanding of the CVF empowers MSLs to adjust our approaches to resonate with the organizational culture. This adaptability is vital for MSLs as they engage in scientific discussions, nurture stakeholder relationships, and contribute to organizational achievements. As organizations evolve, especially when transitioning from a clan or adhocracy culture to a market-oriented one, leadership must intentionally preserve beneficial aspects of the previous culture. As MSLs, being aware of these transitions and learning to adapt can be a key differentiator in our professional journeys.

In the following sections of this article, each culture type is described along with the corresponding behaviors and values. Additionally, practical tips for MSLs on adapting to different cultures and navigating various scenarios are provided.

Understand the CVF

Figure 1 *Competing Values Framework for Organizational Culture Types*

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Understanding the Competing Values Framework (CVF)

The CVF delineates four primary organizational culture types, each defined by a distinct set of values, beliefs, and behaviors. These cultures are mapped out as quadrants in a two-dimensional space, defined by the competing axes of flexibility versus stability and internal versus external orientation.

1. **Clan Culture (Collaborate Quadrant)**
   In a clan culture characterized by a familial atmosphere and an internal focus, MSLs act as team players, valuing collaboration, cohesion, and a nurturing environment. They prioritize building strong, personal relationships with team members and stakeholders, fostering teamwork and supportive communication. Leaders in a clan culture are seen as mentors or parental figures, fostering a sense of unity and loyalty among employees.
2. **Adhocracy Culture (Create Quadrant)**
   Within an adhocracy culture, which thrives on innovation, creativity, and an external orientation, MSLs embrace a proactive and innovative approach. They demonstrate openness to new ideas and approaches, contributing to a culture of innovation by taking initiative, proposing novel solutions to challenges, and remaining flexible and adaptable in their strategies. Leaders in this culture are visionaries and innovators, pushing the boundaries of what's possible.
3. **Market Culture (Compete Quadrant)**
   In a market culture characterized by competition, results, and an external focus, MSLs operate with a goal-oriented mindset. They align their objectives with the company's targets, focusing on delivering results and staying competitive. MSLs remain informed about industry trends, adapting their approaches to meet market demands and drive organizational success. Leaders are competitive and demanding, focusing on goals, outcomes, and performance.
4. **Hierarchy Culture (Control Quadrant)**
   Within a hierarchy culture, which prioritizes stability, structure, and an internal focus, MSLs adhere to established protocols and guidelines. They communicate clearly and concisely, respecting formal lines of authority and following structured procedures to ensure efficiency and predictability in their actions, with leaders acting as coordinators and organizers, ensuring efficiency and predictability.

Practical Tips for MSLs: Adapting to Different Cultures

Adapting to Clan Culture

- **Foster Relationships:** Build strong, personal connections with team members and stakeholders.
- **Emphasize Teamwork:** Collaborate and share knowledge to enhance team performance and cohesiveness.
- **Supportive Communication:** Engage in open and supportive communication, offering help and encouragement.

Navigating Adhocracy Culture

- **Embrace Innovation:** Be open to new ideas and approaches and contribute to the culture of innovation.
- **Take the initiative:** Show willingness to take risks and propose novel solutions to challenges.
- **Adaptability:** Stay flexible and be prepared to shift directions as new opportunities arise.

Thriving in Market Culture

- **Goal-Oriented:** Align your objectives with the company's targets and focus on delivering results.
- **Competitive Awareness:** Stay informed about industry trends and how they impact your role and objectives.
- **Efficiency:** Prioritize tasks and projects that directly contribute to the organization's bottom line.

Succeeding in Hierarchy Culture

- **Follow Procedures:** Adhere to established protocols and guidelines, ensuring consistency and reliability.
- **Clear Communication:** Communicate clearly and concisely, respecting the formal lines of authority.
- **Organized Approach:** Plan and execute your activities focusing on efficiency and predictability.

Table 1 Potential Scenarios Demonstrating the Impact of Organizational Culture on MSL Engagement Strategies

CVF Quadrant	Issue	Challenge	Advantage
Clan Culture	Slow decision-making due to an overemphasis on consensus and collaboration.	An MSL's innovative proposal to engage with KOLs is delayed due to the need for extensive consultations and a desire to maintain team harmony.	Despite the deliberative process, the collaborative approach results in a well-rounded engagement strategy with KOLs, incorporating diverse perspectives and leading to strong buy-in from the team.
Adhocracy Culture	Lack of consistent strategies due to a constant push for innovation and risk-taking.	An MSL finds it difficult to establish long-term plans with KOLs as the organization frequently changes focus, undermining sustained initiatives.	The organization's culture of innovation allows the MSL to swiftly adapt their engagement strategies with KOLs in response to emerging trends, leading to pioneering collaborations and impactful outcomes.
Market Culture	High pressure to achieve immediate, quantifiable results, potentially at the expense of long-term relationship building.	An MSL is pressured to prioritize short-term engagement metrics with KOLs, leading to quantity-over-quality interactions and possibly eroding trust.	The MSL effectively balances the need for short-term results with the cultivation of meaningful relationships with KOLs, resulting in mutually beneficial partnerships that yield both immediate and long-term value.
Hierarchy Culture	Rigid protocols stifle adaptability and responsiveness.	An MSL faces bureaucratic hurdles when initiating a novel collaborative project with a KOL, resulting in a lost opportunity due to slow approval processes.	Despite the initial bureaucratic challenges, the MSL adeptly navigates the hierarchical structure, leveraging formal protocols to gain necessary approvals and ensure the successful implementation of the collaborative project with KOLs.

In conclusion, incorporating the insights and strategies of the Competing Values Framework (CVF) into our role as MSL can significantly enhance our ability to navigate and succeed in varying corporate cultures. Understanding the CVF not only aids in personal adaptation but also fosters effective communication and collaboration within and across teams, ultimately contributing to organizational success.

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Tayo Fakunle is a seasoned Medical Science Liaison with nearly a decade of experience in Medical Affairs across pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, and medical device companies. Most recently, she served as an MSL at Syneos Health, a global professional services organization offering integrated commercial and clinical solutions to biopharmaceutical companies. Tayo's therapeutic expertise encompasses Respiratory, Allergy and Immunology, Orthopedics, Cell Therapy and Regenerative Medicine. She is dedicated to fostering strong, outcomes-driven relationships with healthcare professionals and academic institutions through evidence-based scientific dialogue, research support, and disease-state education. In addition to her professional pursuits, Tayo is passionate about innovative approaches to professional development and education, leveraging her extensive educational background. She is the founder and owner of Ilera LLC DBA " I am Pluripotent" an Arizona State University-affiliated social venture dedicated to providing after-school STEM learning opportunities for diverse youth, preparing them for future STEM careers.

Enhancing Creativity and Productivity as an MSL – Part 2: Productivity in Practice

By Lindsay Stautzenberger, PharmD, MBA | Summer 2024

Oui. A word I feel so strongly about I have it permanently inked on my arm. Like many of us, I am acutely aware that the time we are gifted in this life is finite. With that, I approach life by saying "yes" whenever I can. "Yes" to new opportunities, "yes" to new experiences, "yes" to new connections, "yes" to get the chance to see and do and feel as much as possible in life.

Subsequently, I am also determined to be as efficient as possible in work and life. A self-described "productivity nerd", I have spent countless hours researching and learning and applying a multitude of productivity tools and processes to streamline how I work, allowing me to say "yes" to as many opportunities as possible.

In Part 1 of this 2-part series, we explored the essence of creativity and its application to the MSL role. In Part 2 we will discuss how to consciously improve productivity in your day to day so that you can implement creative ideas and be as efficient as possible – thus allowing you to say "Oui" to opportunities that come along, boosting your performance as an MSL and in your

career.

Guiding Principle of Productivity

In general, the overarching goal should be to minimize redundancy as much as possible. Of course, every interaction with a KOL or meeting with teammates is unique, but there are certain things inevitably done before, during and after that are repeatable. The goal here is to automate as much as possible to reduce time spent on repeatable tasks that will free up your energy and mental space for things that have greater impact.

Ways to minimize redundancy:

1. Checklists – don't rely on your brain to remember the many things you have to do to prepare for and follow up on before or after an interaction or meeting. Your list can take any form that works for you (Word document, OneNote page, sticky note) and it will likely need to evolve over time as requirements for documentation (surveys, systems, business metrics) change.
2. Templates – Similar to a checklist, you can maximize your efficiency by creating templates you can use and customize for each interaction. For example, I would use a template to record notes during the interaction and another template for email follow up after. Although the content changes, not having to start from scratch saves you precious moments each time.

Embrace Technology (but don't let it consume you)

Don't shy away from technologies to help you in your day-to-day work. If you have a problem, there is a tool out there that can probably solve it. Everyone had to learn how to use a pencil and paper at some point, so don't let your fear or overwhelm of learning a new tool prohibit you from something that might really lighten your load. Something as simple as a shortcut on your keyboard or sorting your email messages a certain way might completely change the way you view your daily to-dos.

That said, be open to new tools, but don't discredit tried and true methods. Technology, advancement, new software and new tools appear every day, and although it is important to leverage those new tools to work smarter, speaking from experience, it's easy to get sucked in and waste time trying to learn new tools, chase the better software, etc. Try to identify specific gaps or challenges for you and seek to fill or correct those specific things. If a process is already working for you, maybe you don't need to change it.

Small Investments Pay Dividends

Invest some time in exploring various productivity methods. There are people and companies that have built their entire careers on how to work smarter. Leverage the work and information they have made available to find a method that works for you. Understand that we all work and process information differently, and that one method might work better for you than another. And you may not need to implement an entire system – a small part of it may be helpful for you.

For example, I have adopted the "GTD" method (perform a quick internet search to learn more) for managing my inbox and daily to-do's. I have created a hybrid system over the years that allows me to keep my inbox and to-do list in check without adopting the entire system end-to-end.

Other productivity methods:

- Kanban
- Eat the Frog
- The Action Method
- The 3-3-3 Method

Don't Reinvent the Wheel

Talk to others. It's amazing how many ways there are to achieve the same result. I love when someone shares with me their methods, tools, etc. because ultimately it makes me think about how I can do something better or differently. Conversely, sharing how you do something with another person may greatly help them as well.

Don't Let Perfection Get in the Way of Good

Whether it's an email, preparation for a presentation or meeting with a colleague, know that at some point it is "good-enough". Trying to aim for perfect can be a waste of time. I am a firm believer in "Late-stage tweaking results from lack of commitment".

Do your task, polish it up and commit.

On that note, I will conclude by stating that one of my favorite things about working in Medical Affairs and as an MSL is that it is an amazing playground to be able to explore creativity and new methods to improve productivity. I hope that by sharing my thoughts and experiences in these articles you have been inspired to view your role and the day-to-day work that you do in a different light to ultimately improve the lives of patients in a new way.

**The views expressed in this article belong to me, the author, and not my employer or affiliates.*

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She is a “professional amateur” photographer who loves spending time with her family, music, art, tennis and travel

Disentanglement of the MSL interview Process: A Thorough Analysis

By Alex Palumbo, PhD | Summer 2024

Disclosure:
This text represents my own views and not the ones from my former or current employer(s).

The Medical Science Liaison (MSL) profession requires a specific set of skills ranging from scientific background, personal engagement to perseverance and organizational skills. As the MSL interview process attempts to cover these aspects, it represents a challenging task and requires a lot of preparation. This article provides some insights that may help to ascertain whether the application and potential offer letter is worth the position.

The application step offers an initial opportunity to decode the requirements from the company. Job descriptions and the mentioned requirements may vary depending on the company (big pharma vs. start-up), life cycle of the compound(s) (pre-lunch, launch, or post-lunch) or a company’s current strategy (competitive intelligence). It is necessary to reflect on both the experiences that the applicant can apply in the new role and the expectations on the role and future career.

A subsequent screen call with a recruiter from the company’s talent acquisition team or third-party subcontractor can be used to decipher the infrastructure the applicant will work in (e.g. territory, group size, reporting line, underlying reason of available

position etc.). During the call, the applicant should evaluate and communicate how these factors agree or disagree with their own interests and preferences to ensure potential (mis)alignment with the recruiter. It is also important to mention notice period and compensation as these factors are crucial for the company to fill the position and the applicant's satisfaction.

Usually, a second call will take place with the hiring manager. The hiring manager is often the supervisor and might be a MSL lead or a director of the department. This may vary according to company size,as smaller companies tend to have shorter reporting lines and do not always have the financial flexibility for a MSL lead. This circumstance offers a chance to decipher the inner workings of the company and what the company expects from the open position. Therefore, it is important to ask how the MSL role is defined in the company and what specific tasks, which are usually not described in detail in the job description, need to be addressed. The tone, length, and depth of the response are good indicators of the dynamics between the applicant and the hiring manager.

As the MSL interview process is also utilized by the company to scrutinize the applicant's scientific background, communication and interpersonal skills, the next step represents a third call during which the applicant will present a paper and discuss the data and implications with the hiring manager, and further colleagues (director and/or prospective colleague from the medical affairs department (e.g. medical advisor or further MSL), lead functions from sales and/or market access department). Although the applicant might experience a feeling of being in a spotlight, this interview setup offers an insight to cross-functional work and potential internal misalignments. The applicant should proactively emphasize how all participants benefit from the knowledge of the presented paper and the applicant's capabilities. Such undertaking will ensure to consider all participants as a functional unit and imagine a future work environment.

Ultimately, the last step of the MSL interview process will include the negotiation of contract related topics such as compensation, vacations, car policies, pension plan etc. The communication with human resources (or as named in many companies "people and culture") should be used to double-check all information gathered during the interview process. The applicant should evaluate how the company deals with open questions as a feeling of "rushing through" might induce a feeling of insecurity and doubt for the applicant.

Finally, each step of the MSL interview process enables the candidate to exit the application. The applicant should not necessarily wait for the company's response and give the company the opportunity to find the best candidate if the role is not the right one.

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I am a neuroscientist by training and I am currently a medical scientific liaison manager at Teva Pharmaceuticals. I am also part of the global medical affairs committee for the organization of internal events related to medical affairs and MSLs.

Guide to Accessing the Medical Department: Junior MSL Profile

By Sonia Domínguez Zorita, PhD, MBA | Summer 2024

Introduction

The pharmaceutical industry is a dynamic and constantly evolving sector, where science and innovation come together to improve people's health and quality of life. Different professional profiles work hand in hand, as a perfect gear, to achieve these common goals. In this complex ecosystem, the medical department is a fundamental pillar, providing scientific support at all stages of the drug, and ensuring its safety, efficacy, and proper use. Within the medical department, the role of the Medical Science Liaison (MSL) has recently acquired exceptional relevance.

For those junior profiles, without previous experience within the pharmaceutical industry, accessing a position within this sector can be a great opportunity for personal and professional growth and development. In particular, working in the medical department and the role of MSL can be very attractive for these profiles, as it involves constant learning and challenge in an innovative environment. However, not knowing the sector closely can be an obstacle to applying for these positions as it is

difficult to know if your profile is the right one and what you can find as an MSL in your day-to-day work.

In our research project, five students from the MBA Pharma & Biotech at ESAME Madrid, have focused on exploring the role of the junior MSL within/in the pharmaceutical industry, with the aim of providing valuable guidance to those aspiring to enter the sector through the medical department in the role of MSL.

Methods

To carry out this project, we have contacted through the LinkedIn platform with junior MSL professionals from Spain, with 2-3 years of experience in the position, to propose to them as participants in this project. Once we have obtained their consent, we have arranged an appointment to develop the interview through different platforms.

To develop the interview, we have created a questionnaire where we included questions related to the academic background and professional experience of the interviewees and their experience as MSL. The aim of this questionnaire was to identify the key competencies required to work in the medical department and as an MSL, and to obtain practical advice in this regard. Once a total of 12 interviews had been carried out, we collected and worked on the information obtained from them.

Formation required to access to medical affairs

Regarding the formation required to access the medical department in the pharmaceutical industry, the data we have collected from the interviewees have allowed us to reach several conclusions.

Firstly, to become an MSL we found that it is necessary to have previous academic training i.e. university degree, since all interviewees have a bachelor's in health sciences. Having an academic record in this field is highly recommended, as it allows accrediting the confidence and scientific rigor that an MSL brings when in contact with an HCP.

Notably, among those who want to enter the world of MSL, there is an ongoing dilemma as to whether it is strictly necessary to have a PhD to access this position in Spain. We wanted to ask our interviewees about this field and the data obtained indicate that, although the majority have a PhD in different fields, they only represent 58% (Figure 1). Delving into some of their answers, we can state that of those who have a PhD, the vast majority (71% vs. 29%) consider that it is not essential to have one to be an MSL. However, all the interviewees, both with and without a PhD, agree that having one is very valuable and positive for the position, since it is an experience that helps develop a series of skills that are considered necessary for this position. For example, having a PhD implies knowing how to interpret scientific information, the ability to make oral and writing communications, critical reading, resilience, etc. However, all interviewees indicate that these skills are not necessarily linked to a PhD, but they can be learned and developed with time and experience, even coming from a different department or with other professional experiences.

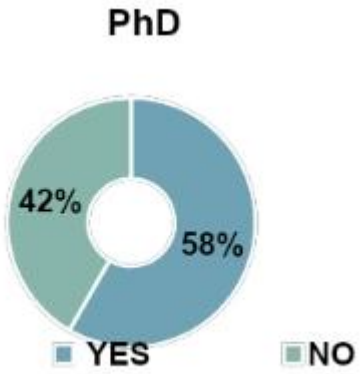

Figure 1. Distribution of interviewees according to whether they hold a PhD (blue) or not (green) in Spain.

Another important point to keep in mind related to the PhD is that it is not yet an indispensable requirement that pharmaceutical companies ask for when looking for an MSL in Spain. However, this is on the rise and is increasingly seen in the job descriptions that priority is given to PhDs or is requested specifically for the position.

The completion of a master's degree to access the pharmaceutical industry is almost a must nowadays, regardless of the department you want to access. A 100% of our interviewees took a master's degree to access the industry in different business

schools, although 58% of them took a master's degree specialized in the medical department, the other 42% took an MBA that allow them to have a global vision of all the departments in the pharmaceutical industry and then focused on the medical department as their main interest (Figure 2).

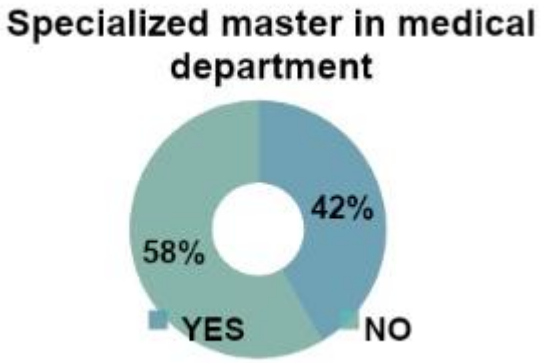

Figure 2. Master's degree studied by the interviewees. The graph represents the percentage of the interviewees who studied a specialized master in the medical department (blue) and who did not (green).

For all our interviewees the master's degree was the main bridge to the industry, thanks to the internships they were able to do in different companies within the pharmaceutical sector. As for the department where they did their internship, 75% of them were in the medical department, which allowed them to have that initial experience that catapults them to the subsequent job in this department. Only a 25% of the interviewees came from internships in other departments, mainly marketing or a hybrid between the two of them. This indicates that there is a possibility of pivoting within the pharmaceutical industry to different departments and that it is not strictly exclusive to do an internship in a certain field so that the future employment is simplified only in that area.

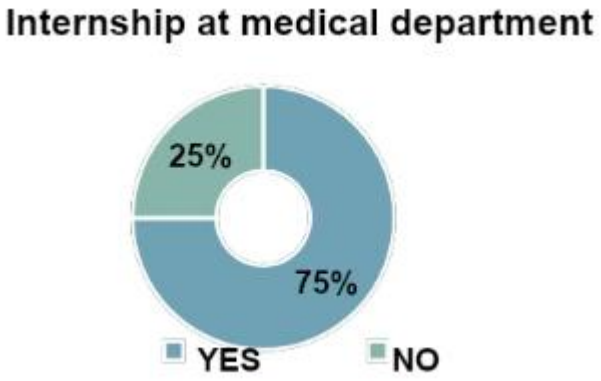

Figure 3. Department in which the interviewees did their internship. This graph represents the percentage of the interviewees that did the internship at the medical department (blue) and the percentage of those who did not (green).

In conclusion, the master's degree has allowed them to delve deeper into the world of the pharmaceutical industry and learn about the different departments and roles that can be accessed with this accreditation.

Besides academic training, the interviewees mainly recommended courses and complementary training to improve communication and leadership skills as well as notions and in-depth knowledge of compliance. They also include languages as a tremendously important point when being in contact with professionals or other colleagues at an international level.

The MSL Pathway, the expected steps to be followed

Regarding when and how they decided to pursue a career as an MSL, the majority, approximately 90%, indicated that they made the decision to become an MSL before starting their master's degree, suggesting that the respondents were already focused on this career path. Some participants mentioned that during their professional internships, they had the opportunity to become

more familiar with the medical department and the MSL role, which further fueled their initial interest in this area. Others noted that they initially sought entry into the pharmaceutical industry due to their interest in hospital visits, and the opportunity to become an MSL arose during their internship.

Regarding the time elapsed from their first involvement in the pharmaceutical industry until assuming the role of MSL, we observed significant variation. This period ranged from 6 months including the internship period, to 72 months, with a median of 11 months (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Interval of months in which interviewees were hired for the first time as MSLs. The histogram shows the range of the number of months, including the months of the internships, which took for the interviewees to be hired as an MSL including their internship.

In terms of previous professional experience, approximately two-thirds of the interviewees had prior experience but not in the pharmaceutical industry. This experience primarily stemmed from other fields, all related to science.
Nearly all interviewees indicated that their current position as an MSL was their first job in the pharmaceutical industry, suggesting that many individuals entered this position directly from their academic background or previous professional experience in other fields. For those who had previously worked in the pharmaceutical industry, various departments were mentioned, including positions such as Medical Affairs, Clinical Development Physician and experiences in agencies focusing on healthcare.
Finally, regarding the year they became MSLs, the data shows that the majority became MSLs in 2021, 2022, and 2023, indicating that hiring has been active and linear for junior profiles in recent years (Figure 5).

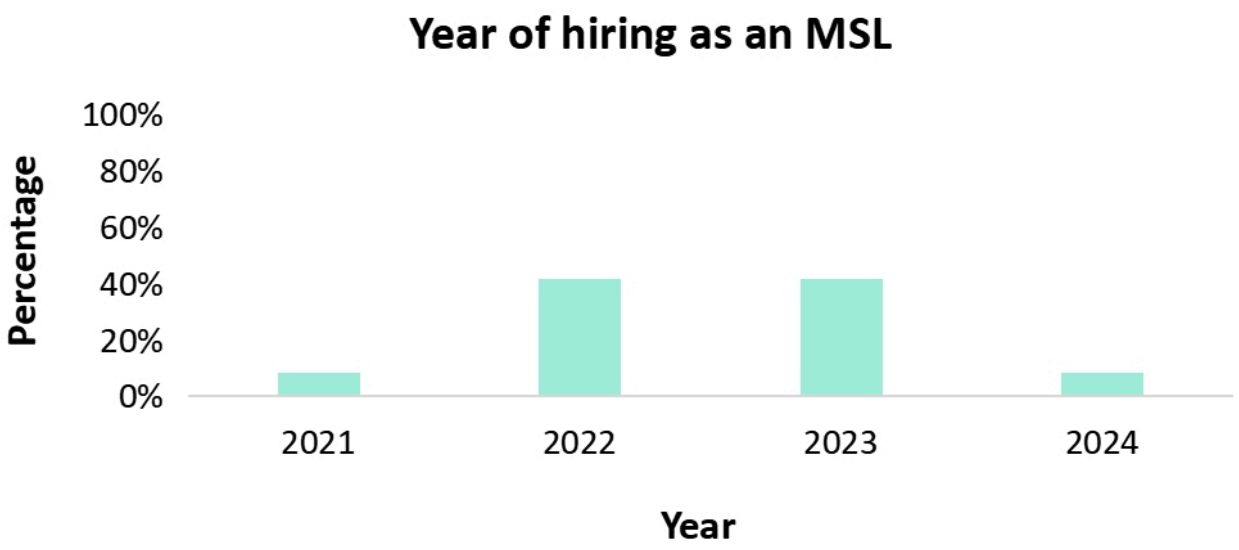

Figure 5. Years in which the interviewees were hired as MSLs. The histogram shows that percentage of interviewees who were hired as MSLs in each year.

Ideal of the MSL Junior profile, what about soft skills?

An MSL occupies a pivotal role, requiring a combination of skills and qualities to effectively bridge scientific knowledge with real-world healthcare applications. Most of the interviewees agree that one of the most important skills required in the MSL role is communication skills. The MSL must not only convey complex information clearly but also have the empathy to understand and connect with healthcare professionals (HCPs) on a human level. This empathetic approach is the basis for building trust and strong relationships, which are vital for the MSL's success.

Moreover, some of the interviewees highlighted that resilience and adaptability are indispensable traits needed to deal with the challenges inherent in the MSL role. The ability to persevere in the face of setbacks, coupled with a flexible mindset to adapt to different personalities and circumstances, is crucial. Furthermore, MSLs must be scientifically committed, in terms of staying updated of new advancements and translating complex data into accessible information for diverse audiences.

Moreover, the interpersonal skills play a central role, with MSLs expected to be sociable, approachable, and adept at seeking for connections both internally and externally. This needs a commitment to continuous learning and self-improvement, as well as the autonomy to manage responsibilities effectively while remaining flexible. Another important aspect of the MSL profile is authenticity, with natural, personalized interactions allowing to humanize relationships and foster open dialogue. In this regard, having a balance between scientific discussions and personal connections is crucial, since the conversations carried out by MSLs need to combine the scientific expertise and emotional intelligence, adapting the conversation to the individual's preferences.

In summary, the ideal MSL possesses a multidimensional skill set including effective communication, empathy, resilience, adaptability, and a commitment to continuous growth. By embracing these qualities, MSLs can fulfill their role as trusted liaisons, driving positive outcomes for patients, healthcare providers, and pharmaceutical companies alike.

Tips on how to break into an MSL position in Spain

Participants were asked for advice in terms of breaking into the MSL role for the first time.

Networking was flagged as a crucial component, interviewees recommended to connect on professional platforms such as LinkedIn with master's degree students, educators, current MSLs, and professionals from other departments within the pharmaceutical industry. In line with this, adopting a proactive approach and striving to go above and beyond expectations were identified as key strategies for success. Additionally, embracing mistakes as learning opportunities and seizing every chance to broaden skills and knowledge were highlighted as valuable advice.

Furthermore, thorough preparation for job interviews was emphasized, including highlighting relevant work experience, and

demonstrating enthusiasm for the role, a distinguishing factor for candidates. Moreover, it was advised to upload resumes to multiple job portals and set up alerts for new opportunities. Keeping an open mind about job possibilities and recognizing the value in all roles were deemed essential for growth as a future MSL. Interviewees also stressed the importance of staying focused on the goal of improving patient health and quality of life. Confidence in oneself was considered crucial for pursuing an MSL role.

Following these tips can help individuals navigate the competitive field of pharmaceuticals and achieve success in their MSL career aspirations.

What are the challenges faced by an MSL on a day-to-day basis?

On a day-to-day basis, MSLs face a wide variety of challenges, as it was reported by interviewees. One of the most common challenges include providing value during medical visits to clinicians with extensive scientific knowledge, establishing trust, and tailoring visits to each clinician's unique profile. An MSL must also meet knowledge challenges, such as the deep understanding of pathologies, staying consistently updated on new developments, and effectively responding to clinicians' inquiries.

In terms of planning, selecting the appropriate clinicians to attend specific conferences and effectively organizing and overseeing scientific events were highlighted as key areas of focus. Logistical challenges have also been identified, such as the need to undertake trips that sometimes require staying away from home. Some bureaucratic challenges such as the ability to classify clinician's insights and incorporate them into CRM was also mentioned by participants.

Lastly, working by objectives poses a continuous performance evaluation through metrics. Interviewees reported that having reliable support from their manager and peers helps them handle these challenges daily.

The most amazing things about being an MSL

Participants report that being an MSL involves a deep connection to the field of science, emphasizing the importance of effective communication and social interaction. They also highlight the freedom to organize their schedule and tasks autonomously and the continuous opportunities for personal growth and learning as some of the most amazing things about being an MSL.

In addition, the dedication to ensure the highest quality in medical visits and the close collaboration with different departments of the pharmaceutical industry due to the interdisciplinary nature of the position are positively valued by participants.

What is looked for in a junior profile in Spain?

Proactivity, enthusiasm and, in short, a positive attitude are qualities that interviewees highlighted as essential for a junior MSL, both when it comes to finding a job and in the day-to-day basis of this position.

When it comes to approaching a job interview for a junior profile, the interviewees have highlighted as essential aspects to know how to transmit motivation and desire for the job opportunity. Being in a competitive environment, in which all candidates have a great academic background, the attitude shown in the interview can be a differential aspect. This can be reflected in the knowledge you have about the position, the company, as well as in the preparation of the interview. In this sense, knowing how to transform previous experiences into lessons learned can be crucial for a junior profile with little previous work experience.

On the other hand, having done an internship within the pharmaceutical industry can be a great advantage, as it allows you to understand the inner work of the industry, and to make your own network and make your work within the company known.

As for the day-to-day basis as an MSL, the interviewees reported that, in addition to fulfilling the responsibilities of the position, in a junior profile you are expected to give more than expected. You should be eager to grow, to get involved in all possible projects and to learn. You are advised to be participative despite the risk of making mistakes, since the important thing is to try to contribute innovative ideas. In addition, understanding the less pleasant side of the profession and showing a resolute attitude are also highly valued in these profiles.

Concluding remarks

The role of the junior MSL in the pharmaceutical industry is a multifaceted one, requiring a blend of academic excellence, practical experience, and a diverse skill set. Our research underscores the significance of academic qualifications, with a bachelor's degree in health sciences being foundational, while a master's degree offers a deeper understanding of the industry landscape. Although a PhD is not strictly necessary, it's increasingly valued, particularly for its enhancement of critical skills like scientific interpretation and communication.

Soft skills play a pivotal role, with effective communication, empathy, resilience, and adaptability being paramount. Networking, proactive engagement, and a willingness to embrace challenges are key strategies for aspiring MSLs. Moreover, keeping the focus on improving patient health and quality of life, along with confidence in oneself, are essential for success in this dynamic role.

Despite the rewarding aspects of being an MSL, it comes with its share of challenges, including providing value during medical visits, logistical complexities, and continuous performance evaluation. However, with support from peers and managers, these challenges can be navigated effectively.

Finally, a positive attitude, enthusiasm for learning and growth, and a proactive approach define the ideal profile of a junior MSL. By embodying these qualities and leveraging available resources, individuals can break into the MSL role and thrive in the competitive pharmaceutical industry, contributing to positive outcomes for patients, healthcare providers, and pharmaceutical companies alike.

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Practical Application of a Single Layer Perceptron and the Path to Unlocking the MSL Value Algorithm (MVA)

By nolie.gutierrez@themsls.org | Summer 2024

BACKGROUND

Artificial intelligence (AI) is changing how the medical affairs industry evaluates and predicts traditional medical science liaison (MSL) value-driven metrics. This paradigm shift is occurring as a result of the increased learning capabilities of neural networks. The implementation of artificial neural networks (ANNs) in medical affairs workstreams will enhance MSL performance by providing dynamic insight into value-driven field activities that complement the broader organizations business model. This technological advancement necessitates the need for a better understanding of how these neural networks operate.

Understanding the basic architecture and mechanism of how a neural network functions can help us in adopting a new data driven approach that can merge quantitative and qualitative MSL metrics. This approach will enable medical affairs teams to optimize their field activity to bring the most value and impact from a scientific and business perspective. This can be accomplished by developing what we refer to as the MSL Value Algorithm (MVA).

The customized MVA will be capable of evaluating and maximizing every unique Medical Affairs key performance indicator (KPI) with the help of deep learning technology. The data-driven approach of using an MVA could help position MSLs more as a complementary and cross-functional business partner within their organization by showcasing their unique business acumen and domain expertise. Our journey begins with an understanding of the basic unit of a neural network, the perceptron. We then show how the practical application of a single layer perceptron can be used to build a more complex deep learning algorithm called the MVA.

NEURON V. PERCEPTRON

A neural network is analogous to our human brain. Fundamentally, a neural network consists of a neuron. Several neurons arranged in an interconnected structure makes up a neural network. Each neuron is linked to the inputs and outputs of nearby neurons (refer to Figure 1). In the context of AI, a perceptron is analogous to a human neuron.

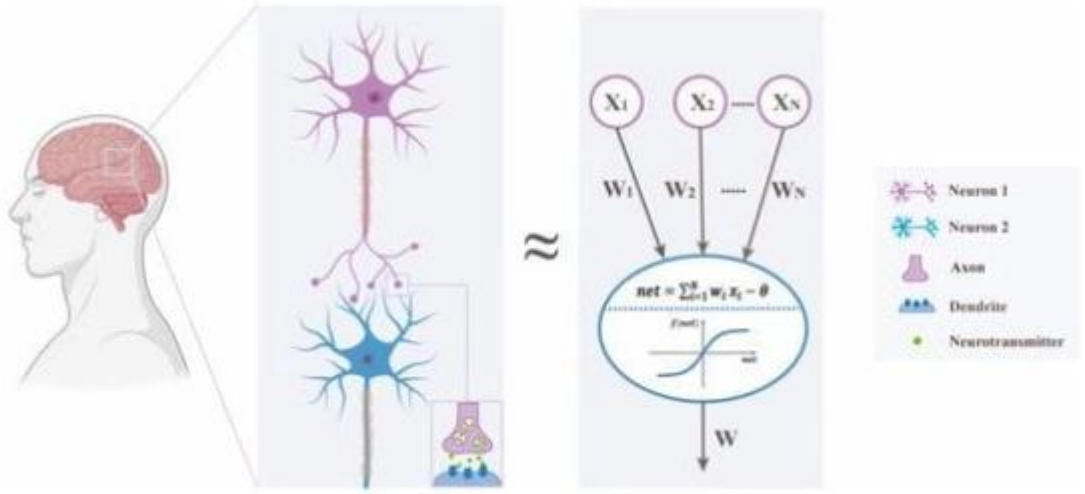

Figure 1. A neural network in AI models the neural network in humans

The perceptron was devised in 1957 by Frank Rosenblatt at the Cornell Aeronautical Laboratory. It was meant to mimic a human neuron in its structure and function. A perceptron functions as follows:

Single Layer Perceptron (SLP)	Example MSL activity that relates to SLP
1. Takes input values from a set of data	X_1 = # KOL interactions, X_2 = # medical insights X_1 = 25 interactions, X_2 = 15 insights
2. Places a weight for these values	MSL meeting with an international KOL has a higher weighting than engaging with a local expert; W_1 = 0.7, W_2 = 0.5
3. The additive sum of the weighted values	$\sum = X_1 W_1 + X_2 W_2$ $\sum = (25*0.7) + (15*0.5) = 25$
4. Activation of a specific neural path once the sum exceeds a predefined threshold	Organization specific threshold value: • Output value of 1 is generated if the threshold is met • Output value of 0 (sometimes -1 is used) is generated otherwise

SINGLE LAYER PERCEPTRON & MSL METRICS

A SLP is depicted in Figure 2 below. The activation function is a special type of mathematical function that helps execute a result. In our example above we will use a random # of KOL interactions/month and # of medical insights/month. These random metrics are weighted by the organization (i.e., higher weighting is more important to the needs of the organization). After the additive sum of the weighted values are calculated, this corresponding value is then entered into an activation function. The value generated by the activation function is compared to a threshold value set by the MSL leader.

For simplicity, we will use a basic stepwise function to describe how a SLP can be used as a neural network to compute the value and impact an MSL had for a month in the field. It is important to note, additional input values (Xi) and weights (Wi) can be entered, but we are limiting this example to two variables to show the practical application of a SLP or neural network.
In our example, an arbitrary predefined threshold activation value set at 18 would equate to a threshold value of '1' being generated by the neural network. This would correlate to the MSL meeting their monthly value metric. Conversely, a value below 18 would indicate the MSL did not meet their monthly performance metric.

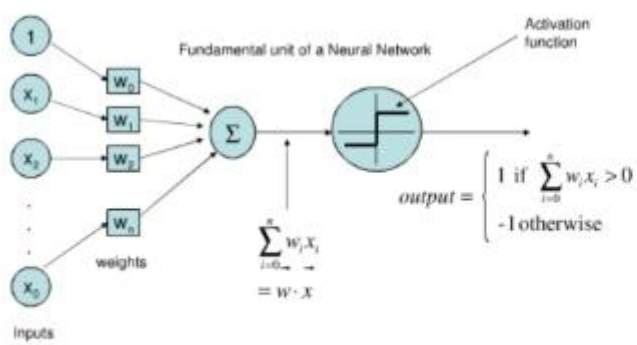

Figure 2. A Single Layer Perceptron

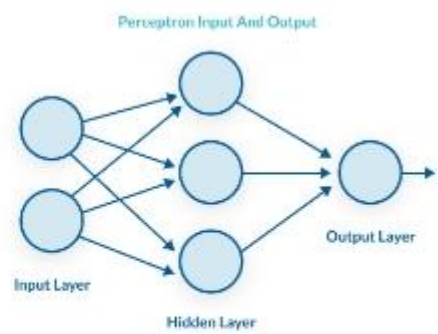

Figure 3. Simplified SLP with 1 hidden layer

Configuring our SLP in a machine learning application allows us to see how this approach could be implemented across medical affairs teams. We utilized our Microsoft® Azure technology stack and our internal integrated development environment (IDE) to execute our machine learning algorithm. It is not important to understand the Python code in the example below. Rather, this example highlights how a basic SLP can provide additional value to managers when evaluating MSL performance metrics. It is important to point out that these numerical metrics were randomly generated to demonstrate how this SLP computes these two values. No client data or third party data was used for our example.

Figure 4. SLP implementation in a machine learning algorithm

Example: 25 interactions, 15 insights, w/ specific weighting

```
x_input = [25, 15]
w_weights = [0.7, 0.5]
threshold = 18

def step(weighted_sum):

  return step(weighted_sum)

print

17.5
25.0
output: 1
```

Example: 8 interactions, 15 insights, w/ specific weighting

```
x_input = [8, 15]
w_weights = [0.7, 0.5]
threshold = 18

def step(weighted_sum):

  return step(weighted_sum)

print

5.6
13.1
output: 0
```

The output of the SLP machine learning algorithms can be provided in real-time if configured to an organization's dashboard or CRM platform. This methodology would enable managers the opportunity to react efficiently to emerging trends coming from MSL field activities. It would also afford the opportunity to provide constructive feedback to the MSL team that would in turn, help optimize performance and bring greater value to an organization.

MULTI-LAYER PERCEPTRON & THE MSL VALUE ALGORITHM

Whereas a SLP has only one hidden layer (refer to Figure 3), a multi-layer perceptron (MLP) has multiple layers. This is also referred to as a deep neural network (DNN). Similar to an SLP, hidden layers receive input data, processing it using a specific weighting, and applying an activation function to produce a specific output.
A SLP can only learn linearly separable patterns, thus limiting its practical use. For non-linear data, such as qualitative MSL activities, a SLP is not sufficient for data analysis. In these instances, a MLP or DNN is preferred because it can process complex and massive data and perform more intense mathematical computations.

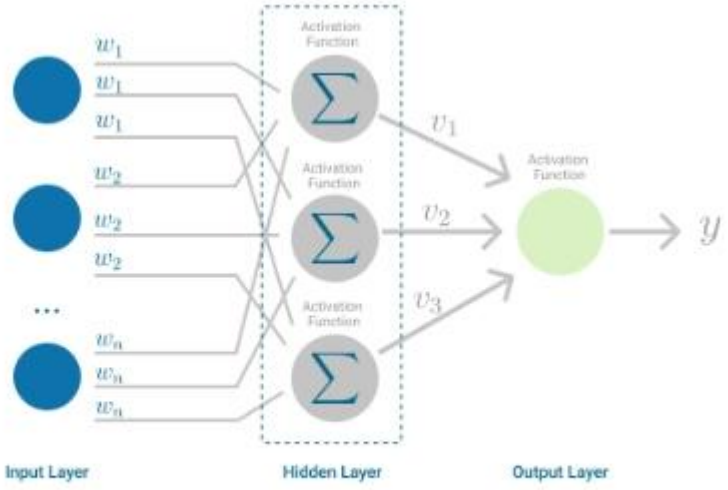

Figure 5. Multi-Layer Perceptron

Applying a real-time data-driven approach to all MSL field activities, both qualitative and quantitative, can now be accomplished more efficiently with the help of MLPs and Deep Neural Networks. For example, we can take a list of popular MSL field activities from a spreadsheet and enter them in a MLP to yield customized performance results for an entire MLS team in a matter of minutes (refer to Figure 6).

MSL Contributions (X)	Weighting (W)	January	February	March
KOL interactions	0.7	25	26	18
MI Fulfillment	0.1	2	5	4
Speaker Training	0.9	2	1	2
Advisory Board	1	0	0	1
...	...	...	...	...
...	...	...	...	...

Figure 6. Traditional MSL contributions can now be analyzed using a MLP and DNNs

A customized MSL Value Algorithm can be created using the principles of a MLP and leveraging the power of current deep neural networks. This approach has the potential to optimize workflows, enhance productivity, and bring maximum value to MSL field contributions.
We will provide a more detailed explanation of configuring a deep neural network in an upcoming publication. Please note that configuring a robust DNN requires additional considerations that are not addressed in this publication. These include, but are not limited to, backpropagation, bias, cross entropy, other activation functions, and the vanishing gradient problem. These considerations have been omitted for the purposes of simplifying our basic model and to highlight the feasibility of using current MSL KPIs and computing power to assess value using the power of neural networks.

CONCLUSION

Deep neural networks can augment traditional MSL KPI assessments to help provide additional depth and dimension to the incredible work MSLs provide to an organization. Both quantitative and qualitative MSL contributions can now be evaluated using deep learning techniques. This approach allows organizations to see structure and correlations in data that would otherwise have been difficult to see.

Neural networks need two things to operate well: a high level of compute power and lots of data. We have both elements in abundance today, therefore making implementation of deep learning strategies for MSL activities feasible and impactful for MSL teams.

By partnering with internal data scientists, medical affairs leaders can explore new ways of evaluating traditional MSL KPIs using deep learning strategies. This data-driven approach can enable MSL teams to customize their field activities in real-time to help

bring maximum value to their organization.

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From Expert to Educator: Training Techniques for Medical Science Liaisons

By Keith Willis | Summer 2024

MSLs face unique challenges when they step into the role of trainer for sales representatives. MSLs are deeply knowledgeable about clinical information; they often have not been in sales which is very different from KOL engagements. MSLs are crucial in disseminating their knowledge to sales teams, ensuring that the information conveyed is accurate and compelling. Without education in training techniques, these responsibilities can be daunting. This article aims to bridge that gap, providing MSLs with training strategies that are practical, effective, and easy to implement. By enhancing their training skills, MSLs can impact the knowledge and confidence of the sales teams they train, driving better results across the board.
MSLs are asked to conduct training on the Package inset, clinical trial information, Real World Data, and other related clinical information. These training sessions tend to be didactic. Participants memorize the information but struggle to apply it in a sales situation. Here are five strategies to use when asked to develop or facilitate training for the sales team.

Chunking in Adult Learning

Chunking is a widely used strategy that's beneficial when dealing with complex information or copious amounts of data. This method involves breaking down information into smaller, manageable units or "chunks," making it easier for learners to process, understand, and remember the content.

Provide the training material into well-organized sections that logically flow from one to the next. Each chunk should focus on a single concept or task. After each section, include activities or discussion questions that allow learners to apply what they have just learned. This practice helps solidify the information and connect it to existing knowledge.

The Impact of Active Learning:

This approach involves the learner directly in the learning process through activities such as discussions, problem-solving, case studies, and hands-on tasks. Active learning helps improve understanding and retention by encouraging learners to apply concepts in practical scenarios. This method leverages the diverse experiences of adult learners and can lead to deeper understanding and enhanced critical thinking skills. While MSLs are not involved in the sales process, they can utilize sales trainers to provide feedback on role-play scenarios using clinical information. They can also leverage their experience with HCP interactions.

By incorporating active learning strategies into their training sessions, MSLs can create a more engaging learning environment. This empowers sales representatives with the knowledge they need and equips them with the skills to apply this knowledge.

Leveraging Storytelling Techniques in Training

Storytelling is a powerful tool that can transform training sessions from mundane to memorable. Stories help to contextualize learning, making it easier for learners to apply knowledge during sales calls. I remember an MSL, who was conducting PI training, shared a story about an adverse event. Years later I remember the story and the relevance to the product. Stories that evoke emotions are more likely to be remembered by participants. MSLs can share firsthand experiences or patient testimonials that highlight challenges and triumphs related to the product. By integrating storytelling techniques into training strategies, MSLs can ensure sales representatives are informed and can apply their knowledge.

The Power of Spaced Repetition in Learning

Spaced repetition is a powerful learning technique that involves spreading learning over several sessions and repeating key information at increasing intervals. This method is crucial for long-term retention and is exceptionally effective because it capitalizes on the psychological spacing effect. Our brains are better at retaining information if learning sessions are spaced out over time, rather than crammed into a single session.

By reviewing information at gradually increasing intervals—starting shortly after the initial learning session, then extending the time before subsequent reviews—this strategy reinforces knowledge and enhances memory retention and recall.

Enhancing Training Through Feedback and Reflection

Regular feedback allows learners to understand their progress and areas for improvement. Encouraging reflection on what has been learned and how it applies to their work can deepen understanding and encourage continued learning. Feedback and reflection are critical components of training.

Conclusion

We explored training strategies for MSLs. Often without training on adult learning strategies, MSLs face the challenge of ensuring their training is engaging and educational. We discussed several strategies to enhance training including Chunking, Active Learning, Storytelling, Spaced Repetition Feedback, and Reflection.

By integrating these strategies, MSLs can deliver training that imparts knowledge, and empowers sales representatives to utilize the information, driving better performance and outcomes.

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Keith Willis is the President of Core Management Training. His experience includes sales, sales leadership, operations, and sales training in diverse therapeutic areas. He has worked with several large pharmaceutical companies including Ciba Geigy, Johnson and Johnson, Wyeth, Pfizer, Otsuka, and Bristol Myers Squibb. Keith utilizes his rich experience to offer tailored solutions that empower clients from various sectors to achieve excellence in their performance.

The Art of Being an Impactful MSL

By Kimberly Cremers | Summer 2024

Professional school, onboarding, and years of experience can provide us with lots of useful science and skills but that does not always translate into success as an MSL. What makes the difference? Having impact as an MSL requires a bit more nuance with our communication to ensure we are navigating through each engagement to the desired outcome. Spoiler alert… that outcome might not be the one we expected or planned! Having impact with scientific exchange is an art. Are you practicing your art?

Why is Picasso’s art any different than a 5-year old’s scribbles? Picasso sometimes uses under ten strokes! So does a 5-year-old!

Why is it that one MSL on my team does so well with continued engagement and I struggle with my doctors ghosting me?

Based on our experience in the MSL space and with coaching MSLs to success, the most successful MSLs are skilled in the ***art*** of being an MSL, not simply skilled at communicating scientific data.

For example, let’s take ‘active listening,’ a skill taught repeatedly to new MSLs. While they may not teach this in graduate school, when the topic of ‘active listening’ comes up in training in our professional lives, we struggle to stay alert, to avoid our eye roll, and to make sure we don’t say “duh!”

But what the MSL artists know about ‘active listening’ goes beyond the steps outlined in the course.

- While traditional active listening emphasizes paraphrasing, the MSL artist finds a way to get to the ‘what else’ four levels below the surface
  Consider implementing your art by asking clarifying and probing questions to dive into a deeper conversation, getting to the “what else”
- While traditional active listening emphasizes the importance of being present, virtual interactions can make this even more challenging, the artful MSL understands the psychology of how eye contact helps someone feel heard
  Consider optimizing eye contact through camera placement and utilizing your full screen landscape to ensure that each virtual contact is mimics the feel of an in-person interaction (note: this doesn’t mean stare into the camera during the entire meeting, that’s creepy and not normal behavior)
- While traditional active listening emphasizes empathy as a feeling for or with, the MSL artist becomes aware of physician pain points and acknowledges them with a simple word phrase
  Consider using “tell me more” or “that must be difficult” and allow the HCP to continue to share.
- While traditional active listening encourages you to avoid interrupting and not to focus on your response, this is a critical component when practicing the art of being an MSL
  Consider waiting 3-5 seconds before responding, giving the HCP plenty of space to continue their thoughts. Never interrupt as it is rude(!), may alienate the person speaking, and stops the flow of thoughts.
- And while traditional active listening emphasizes finding a way ‘in’ to get what we want, the art of being an MSL is being concerned only with AECR (appreciation, encouragement, confirmation, and recognition). This may not result in YOUR agenda getting covered, but the HCP’s agenda (which is more important anyway)! Let’s dive deeper into this concept.

Artists admire the work of others and appreciate something that catches their eye, and it is usually either of minute (often microscopic) detail or the grandeur and confidence of scale. And they usually do so with a silent appreciation. The MSL as artist does the same. Do you…

- Take the time in the waiting room to get a feel for what’s happening in the office? Stop prepping your notes, browsing the magazines, or zoning out and put your phone down. Look around and see, really see, this environment (so that you can comment on it later with appreciation).
- Notice the patients and see, really see, what might be happening to them by observing their gate, their anxiety, their partner.
- Do you really ‘see’ the staff? The best way to do this is to notice the color of their eyes, otherwise you will just be scanning the scene. Is the color warm, friendly, static, vacant? What’s the mood in the office?
- Finally, notice how you feel. What is happening to you? How’s your heart rate, breathing, is your foot tapping wildly? Are you present at this meeting or is your mind focused elsewhere? In medical training, doctors and nurses are told to “take your own pulse before that of the patient.” …Don’t think about your “to do” list on this appointment. Consider instead your “to be” list; who do you want to be to this HCP? How do you want them to remember you?

Take, for example, French pointillist painter Georges Seurat’s painting “A Sunday on La Grande Jatte-1884” (If you missed it at Chicago’s Art Institute, you likely saw it in “Ferris Bleuler’s Day Off”!). Before he took paint to canvas, he did more than fifty preliminary sketches… 50! All the while, it is noted that he was thinking about the following:

- Order
- Design
- Harmony
- Composition
- Balance
- Light
- …and Tension! (critiqued for using dots instead of strokes and for picking a park frequented during the week by those seen of ill repute!)

The message for us: He was not focusing on the final product as much as about the elements *within* the final product.

What about the elements utilized by an MSL practicing their art to be impactful? Might they include:

- Focus on the Other and their agenda
- Being truly present

- Warmth of tone
- Handshake sincerity
- Eyes… Theirs and the physician's (what color?!)
- Pausing to hear
- Waiting (W.A.I.T. is a great inner slogan "Why Am I Talking?!)
- Understanding with "What Else?"
- …and Tension! (How to make this somewhat artificial meeting useful, friendly, and worth repeating instead of thinking "I have to" or "my agenda is")

"An artist is not paid for his labor but for his vision." – James McNeill Whistler.

"Inspiration does exist, but it must find you working." – Pablo Picasso. What do you really see? Our suggestion is that, by doing nothing usual on that next visit, you are working like the MSL Artist you want to become.

Kim and Kevin partner providing insights from the PharmD and Executive Coach on a LinkedIn group called "The art of being an impactful MSL" every Monday and Wednesday.

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Kim Cremers, PharmD, is a licensed pharmacist with over 20 years of experience in medical affairs within the pharmaceutical and biotech industry. Throughout her career, she has demonstrated success in leading medical affairs teams across six companies, handling products throughout their lifecycle and spanning various therapeutic areas. Presently, she utilizes her

extensive background as an external consultant, aiding organizations in the development or enhancement of their Medical Affairs capabilities, specifically MSLs.

As the Founder and CEO of Petrichor Medical Affairs Consulting, Dr. Cremers provides strategic guidance, planning, training, and executional support tailored to organizations seeking to establish, optimize, or expand their MSL team. Aligned with her passion for teaching about the pivotal role of pharmacists within the industry, Dr. Cremers has developed and teaches “Introduction to the Pharmaceutical Industry” to graduate pharmacy students providing comprehensive insights spanning the drug development continuum, from early-stage development to Medical Affairs, including the role of our commercial colleagues. Kim partners with Kevin O’Connor to provide insights from the PharmD and Executive Coach on a LinkedIn group called “The art of being an impactful MSL”.

Kevin E. O’Connor, CSP, CEC

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Kevin partners with Kim Cremers, PharmD to provide insights from the PharmD and Executive Coach on a LinkedIn group called “The art of being an impactful MSL”.

From Setbacks to Success: Six Choices to Foster Resilience for MSLs

By Jill Donahue, MadEd, HBa | Summer 2024

"M*y future has never been brighter*," exclaimed my friend Susie. I was stunned. Her relationship had just ended, her beloved pet was ailing, work was confusing, and she found herself amidst the chaos of moving, surrounded by shattered glass.

I paused, then incredulously asked, "*Tell me more, what do you mean?*"

"*I'm genuinely excited for what lies ahead*," she replied with an unwavering sense of determination.

"*Well, I'll be darned,*" I marveled. Then the two of us analyzed the six choices she credits to her resilience. And the good news? These are choices that you, as an MSL navigating the complex landscape of healthcare and internal politics, can make too.

As an MSL, you are a vital conduit between your company and healthcare providers and their patients. Charged with the noble pursuit of fostering collaborations to share scientific information to ultimately help create better patient outcomes, MSLs often find themselves at the forefront of innovation and adversity alike. On top of that, there are often challenges and changes going on inside your organizations too. With all the uncertainty, it's not uncommon to feel burdened and overwhelmed about the future.

Yet, amidst life's trials, there are individuals who not only persevere but appear to thrive through change. Their key to success? Resilience. The good news? Resilience isn't something you are born with or not. Rather, it's a conscious commitment to self-development and growth. If you choose to foster resilience, it will become an indispensable asset to your success. So, what lessons can MSLs glean from Susie's story? Here are six transformative choices she believes led to her success. Which ones will help you?

Six Choices to Foster Resilience

1. **Choose Compassion over Confrontation:** Susie exemplified the power of compassion and kindness in navigating personal turmoil. By choosing compassion over confrontation, she not only diffused tension but also fostered understanding and goodwill. As MSLs, extending this ethos of care to colleagues, healthcare providers, and patients alike fosters meaningful connections. Choosing compassion leads to assuming best intent and forgiveness thereby promoting essential collaboration.
2. **Choose to Anchor to Your Purpose:** Susie's intrinsic desire to help others, rooted in her teaching background, buoyed her through adversity. Similarly, as an MSL, maintaining focus on your mission—to help improve patient outcomes through collaboration with healthcare professionals—is paramount. Amidst challenges, rekindling this sense of purpose reignites motivation and propels progress.

3. **Choose to Reframe setbacks into stepping stones:** Susie embraced setbacks as opportunities for growth and exploration—a mindset equally applicable to the hurdles encountered by MSLs. Whether navigating regulatory complexities or addressing clinical setbacks, reframing obstacles as catalysts for innovation and professional development fosters resilience and propels success.
4. **Choose Excitement Over Fear:** "Change can be good or bad. It's how you see it that will make it so," said Susie. The physical manifestation of fear and excitement are the same – so why not label it how it will best serve you. Are you fearful or are you excited? Play with the difference. In the ever-evolving realm of healthcare, change is inevitable. It's called the "practice" of medicine after all. Whether it's shifting regulatory landscapes, emerging therapeutic modalities, or yet another restructure, MSLs are constantly challenged to adapt and innovate. Exciting isn't it!?
5. **Choose a Growth Mindset:** Susie prioritized continuous learning and networking, recognizing the value of personal and professional development. Likewise, resilient MSLs actively seek opportunities for skill enhancement and collaboration, fostering a growth mindset that fuels energy, adaptability, and innovation.
6. **Choose Self-Care:** Susie acknowledged the importance of self-nurturance during challenging times, seeking support, and engaging in self-care practices. MSLs must recognize the significance of maintaining their physical, emotional, and mental well-being amidst the demands of their roles, ensuring they are equipped to navigate adversity effectively.

Feeling inspired to bolster your resilience? If you're seeking further motivation, consider exploring **A Dose of Inspiration: 100 Purpose Stories from Pharma Leaders**, an anthology of invaluable stories offering encouragement and guidance. Claim your complimentary ebook at www.excellerate.ca/freebook.

In essence, resilience isn't merely about enduring hardships—it's about thriving despite them. As an MSL, your ability to navigate adversity with grace and determination is instrumental in driving positive patient outcomes. By making intentional choices that prioritize compassion, purpose, adaptability, perspective, a growth mindset, and self-care, you can harness the power of resilience to achieve both professional success and personal fulfillment, ultimately driving meaningful impact in healthcare – and changing people's lives for the better!

About the authors:

Jill Donahue, MadEd, HBa

Jill Donahue, MadEd, HBa A popular speaker, program creator and author of three books, Jill Donahue helps MSLs build teamwork, engagement, and communication skills—all through the common denominator of purpose. She'll know she has been successful when MSLs feel proud of what they do and confident that they can make a difference for themselves, their organizations, and most importantly…patients. Jill is living her purpose by helping MSLs live theirs through The Power of Purpose.

The Art of Being 'A Little Less Wrong': The MSL's Journey

Towards Authenticity and Excellence

By Masoudeh Bahnamiri | Summer 2024

In the ever-evolving tapestry of the scientific world, where discoveries and innovations seamlessly intertwine with the fabric of medical advancement, lies a profound yet simple truth: “The process of science is to be every day a little less wrong.” This guiding principle does not merely illuminate the path of scientific inquiry; it also casts a revealing light on the professional and personal development of Medical Science Liaisons (MSLs). It is a testament to the ongoing quest for knowledge, the humility in continuous learning, and the integrity of sharing unbiased, balanced information with healthcare professionals (HCPs) and key opinion leaders (KOLs).

If there is only one thing that I learned from my PhD journey as a scientist, it is this: embracing the philosophy of being “a little less wrong” each day is paramount. This mindset was ingrained in me through rigorous scientific training, where pursuing knowledge demanded an openness to new evidence and a willingness to adapt and refine hypotheses. This approach does not just apply to scientific research but extends profoundly into the role of MSLs.

For MSL professionals, embracing this journey of becoming “a little less wrong” each day isn’t just about career development; it’s a career imperative. The healthcare landscape, characterized by its dynamic nature and rapid technological advancements, demands a proactive approach to learning. Staying abreast of the latest research, therapeutic breakthroughs, and industry trends is crucial. However, it goes beyond just accumulating knowledge; it’s about applying this knowledge judiciously, ensuring that engagement strategies, scientific dialogue, and the overall impact are continuously refined and improved.

But what truly distinguishes an MSL in their field is not just their knowledge or expertise; it is their mindset. This mindset, centered around the principle of being “every day a little less wrong,” is fundamental for building trust and credibility with KOLs and working effectively with HCPs. It arises from a deep-seated integrity in science, a humility that acknowledges the strengths and weaknesses of one’s medicine, including potential side effects. This understanding enables MSLs to disseminate data and knowledge that is not only fair and balanced but also deeply rooted in genuine care for patient welfare. It ensures that recommendations made to HCPs are sound, reliable, and never compromise patient safety.

Adapting to change is a cornerstone of the MSL profession. The recognition that new data can overturn existing paradigms necessitates resilience and flexibility. It’s about being prepared to modify engagement strategies and approaches in light of new evidence. This agility, coupled with a commitment to ethical standards and unbiased communication, enhances the MSL’s role as a bridge between clinical research and practice.

Feedback and self-reflection are integral components of this journey. They are the lenses through which MSLs can examine their practices, celebrate their strengths, and identify areas for growth. Constructive criticism, when received from peers, mentors, or healthcare professionals, becomes a catalyst for professional and personal development. It encourages a culture of continuous improvement and fosters a deeper understanding of the medical landscape and the needs of those within it.

The collaboration further amplifies the impact of MSL. By engaging with the broader community— sharing insights, challenges, and successes—MSLs contribute to a collective pool of knowledge that elevates the profession. This collaborative spirit not only drives innovation but also cements the role of MSLs as vital conduits of scientific knowledge and advocates for patient care.

In essence, the MSL’s journey is marked by an unwavering commitment to authenticity, excellence, and the ethical dissemination of scientific knowledge. The mindset of being “a little less wrong” each day is a beacon that guides MSLs in their interactions with KOLs, HCPs, and the broader scientific community. It reflects an understanding that true excellence in the field comes from recognizing the power of humble inquiry, the value of integrity in science, and the paramount importance of patient safety.

As MSLs navigate their path, embracing this philosophy not only propels them towards professional growth but also ensures they make a meaningful impact on healthcare outcomes. The art of being “a little less wrong” each day is, therefore, not just a scientific endeavor; it is a moral compass that steers the MSL profession toward greater authenticity, trustworthiness, and excellence in the service of humanity.

About the author:

Masoudeh Masoud Bahnamiri, PhD

Dr. Masoudeh Masoud, BC-MSLcert, PhD, is a scientist with a PhD in Biomedical Sciences. After completing her postdoctoral fellowship at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), she joined Tonix Pharmaceuticals. At Tonix, Dr. Masoud plays a dual role as a Medical Science Liaison (MSL) in migraine and neuroscience, in addition to serving as a subject matter expert (SME) and Program Manager in vaccine, infectious diseases, and neuroscience.

Dr. Masoud brings strong scientific acumen and therapeutic insight into CNS disorders and infectious diseases, supported by an extensive background in scientific communication, cross-functional collaborations, and program management. She leads diverse drug development programs, contributing significantly to the advancement of medical science. Her expertise and dedication are evident in her robust track of scientific publications and her contributions to scientific research and public health initiatives.

Strengthening Collaboration Between Field and HQ Medical

By Christopher Bland | Summer 2024

In the capricious world of healthcare and pharmaceutical development, perhaps no function is evolving more rapidly than Medical Affairs. The role of Field Medical, and especially that of Medical Science Liaisons, (MSLs) has perhaps evolved the most, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, with MSLs serving as increasingly critical conduits between headquarters Medial Affairs (HQ-Medical) and the external stakeholder community. As healthcare grows inexorably more complex, the need for effective and efficient collaboration between HQ and Field Medical is paramount. This partnership is not only essential for the successful dissemination of scientific information but also for ensuring that company strategies align with real-world medical needs and insights.

Healthcare and drug development are inherently interdisciplinary, requiring the integration of diverse expertise from clinical research, regulatory affairs, marketing, and medical affairs. MSLs, often possessing advanced scientific or medical degrees, operate at the intersection of these disciplines. They translate scientific data into practical knowledge that healthcare professionals can use to improve patient care. Conversely, they also relay critical insights from the field back to the company, informing clinical development and strategic decisions. This bidirectional flow of information is crucial for staying competitive and innovative in an industry where scientific advancements and regulatory landscapes are constantly shifting.

Effective collaboration hinges on several key factors. Firstly, robust communication channels must be established to facilitate seamless information exchange. This includes regular meetings and / or open “office hours” for field and HQ Medical to connect, clear reporting structures, and the use of flexible communication channels. Additionally, aligning goals and expectations is crucial. HQ leaders must ensure that MSLs are well-informed about the company’s strategic objectives, while also being receptive to the insights MSLs bring from their interactions with healthcare professionals.

Training and development are also critical components of this partnership. Continuous education ensures that MSLs are equipped to navigate complex interactions in the field. However, MSLs are often under pressure to minimize their time in office,

so while education must be robust enough it ensure that field teams are well prepared, it must also be laser-focused to avoid overburdening Field Medical personnel with excessive administrative burden / office time; thus the educational curriculum should be co-developed and continually adjusted to balance these competing priorities.

While all the above is easily written, it can be very challenging to implement, so below are some elaborations of ways that HQ and Field Medical can better collaborate. While it's unlikely that all these approaches would be viable in every organization, even implementing a few is likely to have a positive impact.

Make Field insight collection, analysis, and dissemination an ACTIVE process. Even the best insight is useless unless it's shared and analyzed, yet in many cases MSL insights are simply collected then aggregate into large databases (where they may go largely unread), often formatted in a manner that makes searching / analysis by HQ challenging. Reports filled with insights may be emailed, but without active, intentional discussion and follow up, these reports may languish in a "to read" pile.

A robust insights process begins with establishing shared goals between those who collect the insights (mostly MSLs) and those who use the insights (mostly HQ), and these goals should be updated at least annually, ideally via one or more cross-functional workshops that occur early in the strategy planning cycle. A manageable list of Key intelligence topics / key intelligence questions (KITs / KIQs) should be co-developed via a dialog between HQ and Field and reasonable insight volumes should be set to avoid perversely incentivizing MSLs to submit large volumes of low-value insight.

Actionable insights should generally be prioritized, and there should be ongoing touchpoints (ideally monthly or at least quarterly) for MSLs and HQ to actively review insights together and identify actions, next steps, follow up, etc. While this process is initially more time consuming, by focusing on quality over quantity of insights, it tends to actually free up time in the field since MSLs don't feel the need pump up their insight numbers. It also tends to produce more value and encourages closer collaboration between Field and HQ.

Bring Field Medical members into all stages of strategy planning. In many organizations there is a stated or implied demarcation that HQ sets the strategy and MSLs carry it out. However, this is a myopic approach that ignores the value and experience MSLs can bring to even the earliest strategy discussions, thus Field Medical should absolutely be involved in setting and refining overall Medical Strategy. The specific ways in which Field Medical can support overall strategy could be based on subject matter expertise (i.e. "Field Leads" for a specific products/therapeutic area serving as core members of Medical strategy teams) or relational (MSL supporting key institutions/HCPs supporting the development of relevant strategies) but they should be included in key working groups, workshops, and planning sessions as part of the core team.

The most common pushback to incorporating MSLs into strategy panning is that this takes them out of the field, but in the post-pandemic landscape, virtually all meetings are now conducted in a hybrid fashion, and virtual attendance eliminates much of the travel and commuting burden MSL once faced to participate in live HQ meetings. Furthermore, those MSL who help to co-develop strategy also help to better amplify, reiterate, and advocate key strategic pillars among their peers, ensuring more robust adherence.

Truly co-create Content. While many larger and midsize organizations rely heavily on vendors and dedicated internal teams to develop content such as slide decks, educational materials, and publications / presentation, MSLs can both benefit from and substantially contribute to the creation of high-quality content.

Field Medical colleagues are often the savviest about what types of content healthcare providers and other external stakeholders actually utilize, both in terms of content and delivery channel(s), thus input from Field from the earliest stage of content creation (i.e. concept proposal) is invaluable, and almost always leads to superior results.

During the development of content, MSLs / Field colleagues can provide valuable guidance to enhance accessibility and value to external stakeholders. Insights about what works in the field have become particularly valuable in an age when enhanced content (i.e. podcasts, infographics, Plan-Language Summaries, etc.) has become the norm, especially considering how expensive this type of content can be to produce and maintain. Lastly, MSLs / Field colleagues who may wish to explore other functions can benefit from working closely with the various HQ colleagues who help develop, review, and disseminate content.

While there is a necessary delineation of responsibility between HQ and Field Medical, it is undeniably beneficial to have robust and active partnership between HQ and field-based colleagues. By thoughtfully and compliantly seeking opportunities to closely collaborate, both HQ and Field benefit. As the industry continues to evolve, strengthening this partnership and adapting ways of working to become more fluid, accessible, and nimble will be key to navigating the complexities of the ever-evolving healthcare landscape and achieving lasting success.

About the author:

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Christopher is a medical affair professional with over 15 years of experience in healthcare and cancer research. Over his career Chris has lead / supported over a dozen oncology drug launches, in disease states ranging from multiple myeloma to breast and prostate cancer.

Chris earned his Ph.D. in Molecular and Cellular Biology at Baylor College of Medicine (BCM) and conducted postdoctoral research on mechanisms of HER2+ breast cancer treatment resistance at BCM and MD Anderson Cancer Center (both in Houston). He later completed his MBA at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business, where he was recognized as a Key Corporate Incentive Program Scholar.

Chris is a Senior Medical Director at Pfizer and previously built out and led the oncology global medical affairs engagement team at GlaxoSmithKline, and worked in multiple field medical positions at Johnson & Johnson and MolecularHealth.
He and his family are active in pet rescue and pet therapy work; volunteering with their two cats, French bulldog, and parrot at various hospitals and healthcare facilities throughout the Philadelphia metro area.

Don't Miss a Beat with Key Opinion Leader (KOL) Outreach

By Sunayana Banerjee | Summer 2024

Key Opinion Leader (KOL) management, as a vital part of Medical Affairs and commercial in the pharma/biotech space, is the process of identifying and engaging external experts whose insights and experience help guide the development and commercialization of a pharmaceutical product. KOL engagement helps companies to steer new product development, generate data, refine strategy, inform tactics and create relevant, credible and persuasive medical and promotional content. These KOL relationships are based on trust and require long-term cooperation from both parties to be mutually beneficial.

As healthcare dynamics are continually evolving, strategic approaches to KOL engagements addressing identification of successful outreach approaches, challenges, and ideas for solutions, need to be addressed. It is important to maximize effectiveness of communications; be appropriately persistent and be strategic to improve outreach efforts.

- **Understand the Customer**
  Each KOL or decision stakeholder is unique. Do background research on the type of practice, patient demographic, and what they experience. Evaluate their sphere of influence, whether is it global, national or regional, community or academic. In addition, if published, it is essential to read key scientific articles authored by the KOL, to have authentic and balanced scientific discussions as peers. It is important to assess their willingness to engage with industry and if they have any institutional restrictions precluding them from engaging in consultative activities with the healthcare industry. In most instances, KOLs understand that your company has questions and needs expert input. Nonetheless, they expect that companies will have done some background research.

Make sure to review key meeting topics in advance and be prepared with useful insights and relevant statistics. This research process lets your company share information about your products or accomplishments. Ensure that you have access to clinical and research data that augments the scientific exchange.

- **Win Favor by Creating Value and Establishing Credibility**
  Sharing information that is important to the KOL will enhance the interaction, as well as solidify the "why" in the relationship.

  Seek out individuals with expertise in the specific therapeutic niche. If the KOL has led clinical trials, investigator-initiated trials or published in major journals, bring data that will address those initiatives. Align the communication/request/exchange with what is of significance to them. Always remain fair-balanced in your approach to sharing data and information as well in all scientific and clinical discussions.

- **Choose the right communication platform**
  KOLs operate on a tight schedule, and virtual option may be better suited for some meetings. Be flexible with the approach and offer a range of tools for rich discussions. It is important to note that virtual meetings are only one tool in the arsenal of communications. After the meeting ends, plan for follow up opportunities, which can include Q&A sessions, networking time, meeting at a conference, and more. These activities help deepen your connection with attendees; they keep the discussion flowing and offer added value.
- **Prioritize transparency**
  The company should establish partnerships with KOLs whose expertise aligns with their therapeutic or research priorities. Such collaborations necessitate a transparent and forthright approach in communication with KOLs. Failure to address pertinent issues wastes valuable time for all parties involved and may detrimentally affect the relationship. It is imperative to develop a comprehensive agenda and engage with KOLs capable of advancing the company towards its objectives.
- **Offer exceptional opportunities**
  KOLs often seek out invitations to engage in research projects, clinical trials, and advisory boards. They may also enjoy sponsorship opportunities or special networking events. Understanding the strategic imperatives of the company clearly, will help in identifying the appropriate KOL who should be involved in specific initiatives as listed above. Another important factor in the success of KOL engagement, is that key stakeholders are thoughtful and harmonized in their approach towards KOL outreach. This will prevent situations that involve excessive outreach to a single KOL and will allow diverse KOL opinions to influence company strategy in a positive and impactful manner.
- **Embrace emerging trends or technologies that can help address outreach challenges more efficiently and effectively**
  The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the digital transformation of outreach endeavors. Everyone needs to leverage online platforms and tools to reach and engage the intended audience, create and distribute content, and coordinate actions. KOL network analytics have advanced tremendously and can "map" KOL relationships and connections. This reduces research time and makes outreach more efficient.

Social media listening has also provided a means to identify and analyze conversations. It can be a means of collection of insights, as well as helping lead to future scientific exchange. However, some of the challenges with this emerging technology include digital literacy, accessibility, and security.

One important aspect of KOL engagement is how to differentiate between persistence and overburdening. Persistence is continuing in an opinion or course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition. The longevity of persistence is perseverance. When working with KOLs, keep in mind they are busy, and sometimes it is their hectic schedule that prevents a timely response. Lead with positivity and make respectful attempts for communication. There are also times when it is time to move on to another who can provide the expertise. All interactions should maintain professionalism, respect, and lead with integrity.

These are critical changes that we need to make to continue to engage with KOLs more effectively. There has been a major shift in where and how people work. KOLs have become even more selective about in person meetings. We need to be flexible, offer a tailored experience, and work on their schedule. Take advantage of the positive advances in technology and stay innovative with the opportunities.

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Susan Malecha PharmD MBA is a versatile Medical Affairs leadership professional. An accomplished author, with over 20 years of Medical Affairs experience, she has lectured extensively and is called upon to present the latest developments in the areas of Medical Affairs for the pharmaceutical industry. Earning her BS in Pharmacy from Butler University, she completed her Doctor of Pharmacy at University of Illinois at Chicago, and her Masters of Business Administration from Keller Graduate School of Management. Dr. Malecha is currently a Senior Director, Medical Affairs at Gilead Sciences.

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Zed is a graduate of Glasgow Caledonian University with a master’s degree in science as well as Strathclyde University in Glasgow, Scotland, with a bachelor’s degree in marketing/finance. In his free time, he enjoys motorbiking, traveling, playing sports and spending time with friends and family.

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Nina Banerjee MSc PhD leads the Sleep MSL team at Axsome Therapeutics. Nina has worked in US Medical Affairs for 8 years holding MSL and MSL leadership roles progressively. She is passionate about Field Medical Affairs and has given presentations at conferences and academic institutions on the MSL role.

Nina earned an MSc via research in Neuroscience from TIFR, Mumbai, India, followed by a PhD in Neuroscience from Cornell University and a postdoctoral fellowship from the Psychiatry department of Emory University.

Seven Ways to Measure Medical's Modern Strategic Value

By Christoph Bug, MD, PhD, MBA | Summer 2024

With over 90% of KOLs looking to medical teams as partners in achieving the best patient outcome, now is the time to measure strategic influence

With continued investment and innovation boosting therapeutic options available for niche diseases, staying up to date on the latest scientific evidence and guidelines remains a challenge for healthcare professionals (HCPs) and scientific experts. HCPs have 75% more assets per indication than ten years ago. Medical affairs teams are uniquely positioned to partner with HCPs and experts to drive medical education and sift through the mountains of scientific data and information at their fingertips.

A recent Veeva survey of 50 U.S. key opinion leader (KOL) oncologists showed that the majority (92%) find scientific exchanges between experts and biopharmas increasingly important. More than ever, HCPs and KOLs are looking to medical teams to be their partners in achieving the best patient outcome. This means providing experts with current and accurate information to support their education, treatment decisions, patient discussions, and peer-to-peer knowledge sharing.

As HCPs and KOLs seek more frequent scientific interactions, medical affairs are gaining a more strategic role. A modern approach to measuring medical impact is crucial to medical team's growing value and influence in advancing complex treatment decisions. This can better demonstrate medical's role in driving business outcomes as it becomes the third strategic pillar alongside R&D and commercial.

The state of measurement today

Measuring medical impact is evolving from traditional subjective approaches. Tying in quantitative measures with qualitative factors, teams have historically gauged impact through the number of interactions with KOLs, the actions taken after each engagement, and the insights that resulted in a follow-up action.

Yet, weighing the impact of scientific exchanges can take longer periods to materialize since MSLs educate on emerging treatments that take time to show a benefit for patients. This makes it difficult to compare contributions with other data-driven

parts of the organization that can easily track sales-based metrics.

With the lack of an industry-standard approach, measuring impact varies from one organization to another and is often based on size, disease area, and regulatory oversight. According to Veeva's 2023 survey with the MSL Society, there is a lack of consensus between field medical teams and global medical managers. Managers feel the primary key outcome metric of field teams should be indications of change in clinical practice (31%) or capturing insights to improve future engagements (25%). Whereas MSLs believe it to be the strength of relationships (24%) followed by insights (22%) and knowledge transfer (18%).

Medical teams now have an opportunity to become more data-driven, moving beyond traditional activity metrics and tapping into new impact measures closer to the patient.

Translating medical's true value

To unveil medical's important value across the industry, medical leaders can start by standardizing metrics that reflect the field's overarching goal: changing medical practices to advance patient outcomes.

Taking a holistic approach can help overcome the complex topic of measurement. By setting a framework built on simple measurements that track desired outcomes at various stages, medical teams can establish a foundation for translating value. As teams grow and expand their influence, each stage (or module of the framework) can build in complexity as the desired outcomes become more intricate and require more complex analytics.

With this new medical impact model, teams can unlock their true impact on the industry and tie key outcomes to business goals. This model, developed with industry medical leaders, highlights seven pillars in measuring medical value:

1. **Operational effectiveness**
   How effective is the medical affairs organization?
2. **Valuable relationships**
   How well are key stakeholders connected to the organization?
3. **Targeted education**
   Is the information shared closing knowledge gaps?
4. **Actionable insights**
   Are insights helping inform the organization and changing behavior?
5. **Scientific belief alignment**
   How aligned are customers to the company's scientific statements?
6. **Clinical practice optimization**
   Are clinical care gaps and unmet needs being resolved?
7. **Improved patient outcomes**
   How much are patients benefiting from receiving the right treatment?

Teams can start measuring what is most relevant, providing flexibility to adapt to current organizational needs. Ultimately, a strong foundation and operational backbone are key to success. Taking time to establish best practices and ways of working in the earlier modules will lay a solid groundwork that will help measure impact over the long term.

From supportive to strategic

Making the case for a new impact model will further medical teams' role and influence, especially regarding budget, decision-making, and strategic leadership. This guiding framework is a starting point and can help teams map their journey to create incremental successes and build on them.

Measuring medical impact is challenging, but it's achievable and critical for the future of medical affairs. By taking this step forward, MSLs can start to make connections that show impact and apply insights to ongoing scientific education that advance the ultimate goal of improving patient outcomes.

About the author:

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Accomplished pharma expert with a passion for Medical Affairs, believing that strong Medical functions make companies more successful AND improve patient outcomes.

The Power of Patient Stories in Medical Communications

By Paul Riley | Summer 2024

Healthcare professionals are regarded as practicing evidence-based medicine, with their decisions firmly rooted in data and objectivity. But like everyone else, doctors are human and subject to the influence of habit and the comfort of the familiar. Even the most compelling data is not necessarily enough to shift established practices, especially when those practices are regarded as 'good enough'. As a result, many clinicians stick with what they know—relying on familiar medications and protocols not because they lack data, but because they lack the time and headspace to thoroughly vet new options. This isn't a criticism; it's a reality of the pressures and demands of modern medicine. But it does mean that, sometimes, we need more than data to inspire the changes required to improve outcomes for patients and society.

Enter patient stories. While clinical data is essential, it often feels abstract and impersonal. Patient stories, conveying what a patient should generally expect from a treatment, bring data to life, providing a human context that can be far more compelling. Hearing directly from patients about their experiences can create an emotional resonance that numbers and charts simply can't achieve. For instance, consider a young child who no longer experiences nausea after changing to a new medication. In a clinical paper reporting a Phase III trial, this would be just a contributor to a number in a table reporting a side effect profile. But what if a common problem for children receiving the previous medicine was vomiting at school with subsequent social isolation. This isn't just a side effect; it's a significant burden that impacts the child's mental health and social development.

Such a narrative highlights the real-world implications of clinical decisions and highlights the importance of enabling clinicians and other stakeholders to consider more fully the individual patient perspective. The narratives don't replace evidence; they complement it, providing a fuller picture that includes both the clinical and human dimensions of treatment outcomes. Empathy, far from undermining objectivity, enhances understanding and leads to better-informed decisions grounded in evidence.

Some would argue that clinicians routinely ask how patients are getting on with their medicines as part of shared decision making. However, through advisory board meetings with patients, I've learned that there often isn't much time for in-depth discussions, and patients frequently tell doctors what they think they want to hear rather than the full truth. This means doctors often don't get a complete picture of what life is truly like for their patients. They need to rely on being guided more by measurements and data, with little time available for questions about patient well-being. This approach, while necessarily efficient, can mean the clinician is unable to gain a deep understanding of how patients are really doing. Patient stories can fill this gap. They can uncover the real-world implications of clinical decisions. These narratives reveal the hidden burdens of diseases and treatments that may not be apparent from data alone.
Having produced patient films, written patient stories, and recruited patients to speak at internal company meetings and external customer meetings, I have seen firsthand how such media can effectively convey patient experiences. Films can visually and emotionally engage the audience, providing a powerful narrative that stays with viewers long after they've seen it. Written stories allow for deep dives into patient experiences, offering detailed insights that can be revisited and reflected upon. Live patient testimonials at meetings have proven to be popular and impactful, bringing the patient perspective directly to the forefront and developing a deeper connection with the audience. I have presented patient stories in advisory board pre-reads to prepare participants' minds, I have involved patients in meetings to tell their stories to rooms of clinicians, and I have created films of patients to share with congress delegates. Each of these formats has been able to effectively illustrate the real-world impact of treatments, making clinical data more tangible and relatable.

Moreover, with the rise of the healthcare consumer and the increasing interest of regulatory and health technology appraisal bodies in patient perspectives, it is in the interests of pharmaceutical companies to routinely plan and build a library of patient stories as part of their asset development. Such a library will be invaluable, ensuring that the patient voice is clearly heard and considered in any evaluations.

In summary, while data and evidence remain the bedrock of medical practice, the power of patient stories should not be underestimated. These narratives provide the emotional and practical context that can bridge the gap between clinical evidence and real-world practice. By embracing the power of patient stories, whether through films, written narratives, or guest speakers, it is possible to bring data to life, creating that emotional resonance that the data alone cannot achieve.

What can we do to harness the power of patient stories?First, recognise that habitual prescribing is often driven by comfort and familiarity rather than optimal outcomes. By exposing clinicians to patient experiences, we can help them see the immediate and tangible benefits of new treatments, fostering a culture of innovation and improvement.

Second, cultivate a culture of empathy and evidence. Patient stories should not be an afterthought but a central component of medical communications both within the company and outside. They remind us of the human side of medicine, ensuring that patient perspectives are always front and centre in clinical decision-making. By prioritising these narratives alongside clinical data, we can enhance our understanding of the full impact of treatment choices, ultimately leading to more compassionate, informed, and effective medical care.

Finally, plan how to integrate these narratives into medical communications. Consider how to use the narratives to complement and humanise clinical data, making the evidence more relatable and impactful. Patient stories can serve as powerful motivators for continuous learning and adaptation, encouraging healthcare professionals to stay current with new treatments and guidelines. Plan the formats and narratives that will best achieve that.

About the author:

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Paul Riley has over 20 years of experience in the pharmaceutical industry in roles including medical science liaison, medical advisor, and medical affairs manager. Paul is a consultant at Glasshouse Health, where he works with pharmaceutical and medical device companies globally, helping ensure healthcare technologies reach their clinical and commercial potential.

Navigating the Balance: Advocacy and Objectivity in the Medical Science Liaison (MSL) Profession

By Yasmin Hussien | Summer 2024

The Medical Science Liaison (MSL) profession represents the crucial knowledge aspect that bridges the gaps between the pharmaceutical industry and healthcare practitioners. The MSLs responsible for fostering the medical science landscape as they are upgraded with both deep scientific knowledge and soft skills such as communication, collaboration, and relationship-building to build trust with healthcare providers and other stakeholders, the process of educating clinicians about the latest medical and pharmaceutical developments and promoting informed prescribing decisions that ultimately benefit patients and enhance the healthcare. However, there are inherent tensions in this seemingly straightforward task. Taking into account that pharmaceutical companies assign MSLs to provide scientific information and advocate their company's products while maintaining objectivity in their discussion interactions with healthcare professionals, achieving this delicate balance between promoting and disseminating unbiased scientific information represents a challenge that deserves thoughtful consideration.

The Potential Risks of Advocacy

The main duty of an MSL is to advertise the pharmaceutical products of their companies, emphasizing their safety and efficacy. This action calls for some advocacy, where MSLs highlight the product's distinct advantages over rivals and present data engagingly. Effective advocacy involves the inherent risk of undermining impartiality, even while it can lead to better patient outcomes through increased access to cutting-edge medicines. Overzealous promotion can distort facts so that data is presented to promote the company's product while downplaying any potential downsides or other possibilities. This may damage the credibility of medical professionals who depend on MSLs to provide them with accurate, thorough information.

Retaining Impartiality: A Delicate Balancing Act

Every MSL engagement should be based on objectivity. To make knowledgeable judgments concerning patient care, healthcare practitioners need to have access to reliable, objective information. Because of this, MSLs must present a fair assessment by recognizing the limitations of the product offered by their company, including any potential adverse effects and substitute treatment choices. Also, citing reliable sources where instead of relying on anecdotal evidence or subjective beliefs, support their statements with solid scientific data. Also, MSLs must be open and honest about any possible conflicts of interest. Any financial connections to the business or the product they are endorsing should be disclosed. Moreover, they have frank and transparent conversations: Promote inquiry, and attentively hear the worries expressed by medical experts.

Obstacles and the Way Ahead:

It's difficult to remain objective in the face of inherent advocacy demands. MSLs frequently experience internal pressure to meet sales goals, which may lead them to put promotion ahead of fair information exchange. Further impeding objectivity is the competitive character of the pharmaceutical industry, which can stifle candid conversations regarding a product's possible downsides. To get over these obstacles, the pharmaceutical industry must encourage an impartial culture, where businesses should place a higher priority on ethics and openness, rewarding MSLs for offering fair information rather than concentrating just on revenue. It also must give instruction and clear guidelines and offer MSLs the information and abilities they need to successfully negotiate moral conundrums and convey scientific facts in an unbiased manner. The industry must encourage candid communication among medical professionals.

To sum up, the MSL profession is crucial to the healthcare industry, yet walking the fine line between objectivity and advocacy is a constant struggle. MSLs and the pharmaceutical industry may collaborate to guarantee that patients receive accurate, unbiased information that ultimately improves health outcomes by placing a high priority on openness, ethical behavior, and open communication. MSLs may become reliable partners in healthcare rather than just product evangelists by making impartiality the cornerstone of their interactions. This will help to ensure that evidence-based medicine becomes the norm in the future.

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My name is Yasmin Hamdy Mohamed Hussien. I was born in Upper Egypt, in El Minya Governorate. I obtained a bachelor's degree in pharmacy with distinction (Class of 2022) from Deraya University in Egypt. I studied Pharmaceutical Medicine Postgraduate Program at King's College London. I am a Peace, Health, and Climate Scholar at the Boutros-Ghali Chair for Sustainable Peace. Also, I serve as a Reviewer at the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker at the University of Oxford. Also, I serve as a writer at the Oxford Personalised Medicine Society (OPMS) Gene Zine Magazine. Additionally, I serve as a Focal Point of Boutros-Ghali Chair for the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (PMNCH). Furthermore, I serve as a UNHCR Young Champion for Refugees. I am the Author of the Child-Friendly Text of the Paris Agreement and the Co-Author of the Child-Friendly Text of the UN Palermo Protocol. My main passion for scientific journalism is to upgrade young people's mindsets in the context of life science and medical practice.

Healthy Habits for the MSL

By nolie.gutierrez@themsls.org | Summer 2024

One of the most challenging yet least discussed aspects of the MSL role is staying physically healthy.
Most MSLs do a lot of sitting – we sit in cars or planes as part of a commute, we sit during presentations, and we sit during stakeholder meetings. Because prolonged sitting has been associated with cardiovascular and musculoskeletal disorders, a MSL may need to make special efforts to increase physical activity while in the field. Below are MSL-specific suggestions to mitigate prolonged sitting.

Driving

Similar to pre-call planning before a KOL meeting, route planning is key to exercising on the road. Seek out notable places to get out of the car and stretch your legs along the route. Come up with a handful of different options that can be tailored to varying times, since traffic and/or weather could impact your plans. If you are in a time crunch, pull over at a viewpoint or historical marker to stand and stretch; if time is on your side, find a park and walk a trail that matches your fitness level (and your outfit).

Flying

A MSL has ample opportunities to increase their steps at an airport. Even with a wheeled suitcase, long concourses can be used to get in more steps while waiting for a flight to board. Instead of sitting near the gate, stand in the vicinity of the gate at an unused check-in kiosk.

Although the length of time that passengers can stand and move about the cabin will vary for any given flight, it is a given that the aisle seat passengers will have readier access to opportunities to move.

Conferences

Many larger conference rooms have tall tables in the back. Standing at these not only minimizes sitting but also provides a broader view of the room and attendees.

If you are with a colleague at a conference, take turns watching each other's belongings and walk the conference center. Who knows, you may bump into someone you've been trying to meet!

Meals

Besides prolonged sitting, MSLs may find themselves in the fortunate position of partaking in restaurant cuisine. Unfortunately, eating out of home often comes with consuming more sugar and fewer nutrients. When dining alone, the MSL may feel more leeway to select a healthier meal, either by utilizing a delivery service or by finding an acceptable restaurant; it is group dining where there may be greater pressure to conform to family-style ordering. In this case, portion control will be your friend. (You don't have to consume the entire brownie to know that you liked it).

Because MSLs are constantly dealing with ever-changing plans, it is reasonable to assume that your next meal won't happen as scheduled. To stave off hunger in between meals, have snacks on hand that are easy and nutritious, like carrots or almonds. Packing these before leaving the house will help you to avoid resorting to the preservative-laden snacks found at gas stations and vending machines. Lastly on food, nut butter packets are easily packable and can be a godsend when you are hungry in your hotel room.

[1] Adverse Effects of Prolonged Sitting Behavior on the General Health of Office Workers – PMC (nih.gov)
[2] Eating out of Home: Influence on Nutrition, Health, and Policies: A Scoping Review – PMC (nih.gov)

Hydration

Absorbing water (staying hydrated) is crucial for a MSL to remain healthy. Water is essential to metabolic and cellular regulation, and a MSL experiencing the dry, recirculating air environment of an airplane cabin needs to be particularly mindful of the need to maintain fluid balance. Bring and refill a water bottle at the airport before boarding the flight. A MSL on the road might also experience extra thirst – in a rental car, you can never count on the temperature controls to work as you'd expect. To save you the stress of needing to unexpectedly stop to rehydrate, keep an extra non-alcoholic beverage in the car based on the International Life Sciences Institute™ suggestions for high-water content drinks:

Water Intake from Frequently Consumed Foods and Beverages	
NON-ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES	
Water, brewed tea, brewed coffee, diet soft drinks, canned/bottled tea, sports drinks, lemonade, vegetable juice	90% to 100%
Milk (skim, 1%, 2%, whole, chocolate), soft drinks (regular), fruit juice, fruit drinks	85% to 90%

One final reason a MSL should remain hydrated is the potential improvement with portion control.

Putting all of this together, staying hydrated, watching what (and how much) you eat, and minimizing sitting are the three key strategies that will help the traveling MSL stay healthy and capable of navigating the dynamics of the profession.

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Elise is a Seattle-based Medical Science Liaison (MSL) working for UCB. Prior to becoming an MSL in 2020, Elise worked directly with underserved patient populations, overseeing a diabetes team and clinical pharmacy programs. She graduated from the PharmD program at the University of Washington and was the first pharmacy student to concurrently complete a certificate in Global Health. She completed a hospital residency and holds board certifications in pharmacotherapy and diabetes education.

In her spare time, Elise hosts a podcast that raises awareness of fertility research.

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The Cynic in the Clinic: Overcoming HCP Distrust Using Behavioral Science

By Justin O'Rourke, MA, MBA | Summer 2024

Information presented to a health care professional (HCP) is only as valuable as their willingness to accept it. An HCP's distrust in a medical science liaison (MSL) may inhibit the MSL's ability to effectively transfer scientific knowledge. In The MSL Journal's Spring 2024 issue, Dr. Amy Patel analogized the levels of KOL relationship development to the three phases of dating, engagement, and marriage.1 In doing so, she identified trust as a key outcome of each stage. Through the lens of behavioral science, this article will discuss how trust is formed, what MSLs can do to establish trust with HCPs early in a relationship, and how MSLs can strengthen that trust over time.

STATE OF TRUST IN HEALTH CARE

Global trust in health care companies, health media reporting, science, innovation, and institutions in general continues to decline.2-3 Public distrust in pharmaceutical companies can largely be attributed to commercial motives.4 Although HCPs have more experience with the pharmaceutical industry than the general public, it is plausible that public discourse amplifies their skepticism toward pharmaceutical/MedTech companies and their personnel. Thus, it may be more important than ever to adjust HCP engagement strategies to strengthen trust perceptions.
Research tells us that HCPs generally have favorable attitudes toward sales representatives but question the information they receive because of commercial interests.5-6 However, little is known about their perceptions of MSLs. MSLs are tasked with communicating objective, scientific information; a practice that is safeguarded by systems that protect their role from commercial influence. Despite their non-promotional nature, MSLs may encounter the same HCP skepticism as sales representatives. The MSL's ability to quickly establish trust and strengthen it over time is key to engaging in high-quality conversations with HCPs and allowing them to confidently apply new information in practice.

WHAT IS TRUST(WORTHINESS)?

Trust, defined as the willingness to accept the risk of being vulnerable to the actions of others, is made up of four components including propensity to trust, perceived trustworthiness, affect, and heuristics.7 Trustworthiness is based on perceptions of a trustee's ability, benevolence, and integrity.7 These trustworthiness perceptions interact with the trustor's propensity to trust, affect, and heuristics to form a trusting (or distrusting) attitude.8 Trust is then achieved when the trustee is willing to accept the risk of being vulnerable.7 In the relationship between HCPs and MSLs, an HCP's willingness to adopt an MSL's information is a good indicator of trust.

TRUST DEVELOPMENT

HCPs lack the necessary information to judge an MSL's trustworthiness early in a relationship. To compensate for this information deficit, HCPs rely more heavily on heuristics. During this period of unfamiliarity, MSLs can signal ability and integrity, but benevolence must be experienced over time.9 An MSL trying to signal benevolence or express that they would put an HCP's interests before their own may appear awkward and even generate suspicion about the MSL's intentions. Rather, the HCP will learn that the MSL cares about their goals through repeated positive interactions.

Figure 1: Concepts Associated with Trustworthiness Dimensions

Guided by the concepts associated with the ability, benevolence, and integrity dimensions shown in Figure 1, MSLs can take actionable steps to communicate trustworthiness:

SIGNAL ABILITY AND INTEGRITY

- **SELF-PROMOTE:** Perceived expertise substantially contributes to being seen as a credible source of information. If possible, expertise should be established before communicating new information. HCPs may rely on the reputation of an MSL to develop judgments of credibility, so MSLs should ensure their online professional profiles are up-to-date, easily accessible, and effectively communicate their expertise. Additionally, maintaining an active online and in-person presence in relevant professional networks can enhance perceptions of expertise.
- **GET AN ENDORSEMENT:** Being introduced by a colleague who the HCP considers credible may transfer that perception of credibility to the MSL. The introduction also allows the third party to outline the MSL's expertise, avoiding the risk of an MSL appearing to be self-aggrandizing by trying to establish credibility on their own.
- **INDICATE INFLUENCE:** An MSL can increase an HCP's confidence in them by indicating that they have the position, influence, and/or resources to deliver on their promises.
- **KEEP IT BRIEF:** MSLs should tailor presentations to the needs of the HCP as MSLs may lose credibility if they include too many irrelevant details.[10]
- **BE RELIABLE AND CONSISTENT:** MSLs should deliver on promises, even ones that seem inconsequential. Consistency creates predictability, which leads to increased perceptions of credibility. Where practical, MSLs should have a way of doing things and stick to it (e.g. always sending confirmation emails the day before meetings).
- **REMAIN OPEN AND TRANSPARENT:** To be truly objective, an MSL should disclose any vulnerabilities in the information they communicate. Additionally, MSLs should consider using language that allows them to take a more neutral advisory position rather than one that may be construed as promotional (e.g. "The best we know right now…," "The data show…," etc.). And MSLs should not hesitate to say, "I don't know, but I will try to get you the answer."

BUILD ON BENEVOLENCE OVER TIME

- **PUT PATIENTS FIRST:** MSLs can establish a feeling of partnership with the HCP by focusing on patient outcomes. Doing so serves as a cue that reminds HCPs that, like them, the MSL is an advanced medical professional dedicated to helping people live long, healthy lives.
- **BE THOUGHTFUL:** Each HCP has a unique set of goals, curiosities, concerns, etc. Take time to learn about those, document them, and prioritize connecting the HCP with resources that help them fulfill their needs.
- **ENGAGE IN ACTIVE LISTENING:** Active listening shows that the MSL prioritizes the needs of the HCP and their patients.
- **BE RESPONSIVE:** Striving for same-day responses rather than defaulting to a 24- to 48-hour response time demonstrates that the MSL cares about the needs of the HCP. Plus, the best time to respond to an inquiry is when the subject is still top-of-mind for the HCP.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Some of these techniques require finesse, a mastery of soft skills, and a delivery that rises to the level of fine art. While many of them seem obvious, tending to the complexities of relationship building is often sacrificed for other priorities. MSLs who intentionally incorporate these techniques into their engagements can expedite trust formation, strengthen MSL-HCP relationships, and remove barriers to successful knowledge transfer.

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Justin O'Rourke is a behavioral science subject matter expert specializing in relationships between pharmaceutical companies, prescribers, consumers, and other health care system stakeholder groups. In addition to an MBA from the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater, Justin holds a master's degree in industrial-organizational psychology from The Chicago School where he is a student in the Business Psychology PhD program. Justin's doctoral research focuses on trust dynamics in the HCP-MSL relationship. His other areas of research interest include peer-to-peer influence, physician decision-making, and medical affairs engagement strategy.

Maximizing Medical Affairs and MSL Impact: How Choosing a Strategic Launch Partner Propels Success

By Susan Giacalone, MSN, MSL-BC | Summer 2024

In the intricate realm of pharmaceutical launches, the significance of medical science liaisons (MSLs) and robust medical affairs operations cannot be overstated. These entities serve as linchpins, guiding strategic engagement and navigating scientific complexities while optimizing the communication of key medical insights to target internal marketing development strategies. There are countless examples of MSLs positively impacting the trajectory of newly launched products. While it is most beneficial to incorporate MSLs into a launch strategy as early as possible, even when utilized later in the process, MSLs have been proven to catapult assets quickly and efficiently to increased levels of success. According to Veeva data, prelaunch MSL engagement with key opinion leaders (KOLs) either live or virtually results in 1.5 times greater treatment adoption across healthcare organizations within the first six months of launch, compared to healthcare organizations whose KOLs did not engage in scientific exchange with MSLs

One such example is laid out in the following case study from EVERSANA, which illustrates how establishing a robust medical affairs operation and MSL team helped a strategic partnership to overcome industry challenges.

Case Study: A Strategic Approach Reshapes Biotech Company's Medical Deployment Landscape

Background: An emerging biotech company anticipating a Q4 2023 launch of a stem cell mobilizing agent sought to swiftly establish a comprehensive medical affairs infrastructure. The company partnered with EVERSANA to create a strategy, develop tools, staff a team and prepare for an international congress in just three months.

Solution: Leveraging our Oncology Center of Excellence, our Vice President of Field Medical Deployment worked with internal colleagues and the client to assure a timely, organized and strategic approach to a realistic and successful medical launch plan. Key initiatives included the development of a comprehensive medical strategy; the creation of subject matter-relevant medical affairs tools for medical, legal and regulatory (MLR) review and approval; collaborating with the Medical Information and Pharmacovigilance teams to assure there were standard response letters to address frequently asked questions; and recruiting, empowering and educating an MSL team to introduce the company to the KOL clinical community and confidently serve as the face of the company in the field. EVERSANA' s commitment to mobilizing the strategy rather than simply staffing the field ensured seamless integration and strategic alignment with the biotech company's objectives.

Result: This collaboration culminated in the establishment of a fully functioning medical affairs pillar within the company's United States operations, which contributed to the success of its asset launch. Additional notable achievements included heightened product awareness through publications and conferences, significant advocacy with priority KOLs and practical line of sight on go-to-market readiness.

Three Must-Haves to Deploy Top-Performing Medical Affairs and MSL Teams

Effectively utilizing MSLs and Medical Affairs teams is a cornerstone of launch success. However, harnessing their full potential requires more than just assembling teams; it demands a strategic orchestration of resources, partnerships and expertise. Here are three key elements necessary to establish high-impact Medical Affairs and MSL teams:

1. **Strategic Partnership:** To excel in the competitive pharmaceutical arena, manufacturers need a commercialization ally that is neither a staffing agency nor a traditional contract sales organization (CSO), one that transcends the conventional model. Look for a partner with proven subject matter expertise that not only provides bodies, but also offers the ability to create and mobilize strategies tailored to your specific needs. Seek out a partner that has a proven track record of success and is armed with a deep bench of industry expertise. This kind of partnership ensures the alignment of your company's overarching goals and unlocks the full potential of your Medical Affairs and MSL teams.
2. **Cross-Collaboration:** To unleash the maximum impact of Medical Affairs and MSL teams, a strong culture of cross-collaboration within your organization is imperative. Forge a synergistic relationship with internal teams such as Health Economics and Outcomes Research (HEOR), Value and Evidence, and Market Access. By maximizing people, data and resources, a company can formidably navigate the complex terrain of launching a new product in an efficient and expedient manner. Your cross-collaboration efforts should break down silos and cultivate insights that enhance the impact of your strategic initiatives.
3. **Business Acumen:** While scientific expertise is fundamental in medical deployment, complementing it with strong business acumen is essential for driving favorable outcomes. Equip your MSL teams with a nuanced understanding of business dynamics, enabling them to effectively communicate value propositions and align their efforts with strategic objectives. Empower your teams to speak the language of stakeholders across the healthcare spectrum, bridging the gap between scientific innovation and commercial success.

The successful optimization of Medical Affairs and MSL teams necessitates a strategic integration of various elements. Establishing robust strategic partnerships, fostering cross-collaboration and cultivating business acumen among team members are essential components of achieving advantageous outcomes. By embracing these principles, manufacturers can effectively navigate the complexities of product launches, foster innovation and ultimately drive success in delivering value to both patients and stakeholders.

EVERSANA Pioneers Launch Success Through Innovative Medical Deployment Solutions

In navigating the complexities of pharmaceutical launches, EVERSANA has emerged as a leader of innovation and excellence. Through our Medical Deployment solutions, which are strategically designed to cater to our clients' immediate and ongoing needs, we empower manufacturers to surmount industry challenges and achieve unparalleled success. With a rich legacy of building high-performing Medical Scientific teams that are recognized as some of the highest-performing in the industry,

EVERSANA drives transformative outcomes in the pharmaceutical landscape.

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Susan Giacalone, MSN, MSL-BC is the Vice President of Medical Deployment at EVERSANA and has built, led, and re-invented numerous regional and national field medical teams to raise Scientific Share of Voice for over two decades.

During her career, she has garnered great industry success building successful field medical teams as a field-based MSL, regional director, and National Director at Schering Plough, Novartis, Lexicon, Tersera, and MacroGenics. Susan is skilled in building and developing top-performing field medical teams across both domestic and international markets, Her CV includes 10 Peer Reviewed Medical Publications, 1 book chapter, and multiple Field Medical invited presentations.

She has been an award winner for strategy, innovation, scientific acumen, and clinical trials support and was honored as the MSL Society U.S. Manager of the Year in 2019.

A Roadmap for Transitioning From Academic or Clinical Roles to MSL and Other Medical Affairs Roles

By nolie.gutierrez@themsls.org | Summer 2024

Introduction

Transitioning from academic or clinical roles to a career in Medical Science Liaison (MSL) or medical affairs is a significant endeavor. This guide offers comprehensive support for professionals embarking on this journey while emphasizing the importance of cultivating a strong professional image throughout.

Initially, bridging the gap between academic or clinical environments and the corporate world is vital. This involves recognizing and addressing disparities in expectations, communication styles, and workplace culture. Developing a transition success mindset is essential, enabling individuals to adapt confidently to new professional dynamics. Understanding the transition curve is also critical. As individuals navigate through various stages of transition, from adjustment to integration into the new role, resilience becomes key. This resilience empowers them to overcome challenges and setbacks with determination. Furthermore, developing one’s edge and acclimating to the new environment are crucial components. By refining skills, expanding knowledge,

and staying informed about industry trends, professionals can position themselves for success. Understanding the organization's culture and avoiding cultural missteps are also crucial for establishing credibility. Commencing with a clear plan and optimizing the first three months in the new role lay the groundwork for long-term success. By setting goals, establishing priorities, and pursuing growth opportunities, individuals can make a meaningful impact early on. Finally, devising a strategy for ongoing professional development is essential for sustained success as an MSL.

This roadmap provides a comprehensive framework for professionals making the move. By following the key principles outlined and embracing the challenges and opportunities presented along the way, individuals can navigate this transition successfully and develop a strong professional image that will serve them well in their new career path.

Making the Transition

1. From the campus to the office

Progressing from an academic or clinical environment to a career in MSL or medical affairs is a pivotal step, akin to moving from the campus to the office. This change involves navigating new professional dynamics, grasping corporate culture, and mastering the intricacies of succeeding in a business setting. Today's workplace places a premium on financial rewards, work-life balance, meaningful contributions, and finding the right career fit.

Economic shifts also impact the demand for specific skills, underscoring the importance of adaptability and staying relevant. Recognizing these changes and cultivating a strong professional image are essential. The criteria for success and rewards in the workplace diverge significantly from those in academia or clinical settings.

A robust professional image facilitates a seamless transition, enabling swift adaptation and effective interaction with colleagues. This fosters emotional intelligence, nurtures relationships, instills confidence, and mitigates common pitfalls, drawing upon insights gained from academic or clinical experiences.

2. Differences in the working world

One of the primary challenges is moving from a highly structured environment to one filled with ambiguity. Table 1 shows in academia or clinical settings your path is clearly defined with set schedules, modules, and assessments. Conversely, the workplace often lacks such structure, with less defined tasks and more fluid timelines. This shift requires adaptability and a proactive approach to managing your responsibilities.

Another significant change is adapting from being experienced and confident in your academic or clinical field to starting anew in a junior position. This can be daunting as you may feel inexperienced and overwhelmed by the amount of new information you need to learn. Recognizing that this is a normal part of the change can help mitigate some of these feelings.

The move from fixed to fluid timelines also poses a challenge. In academia, the duration of your courses and qualifications is set. In the professional world, there is often no fixed timeframe for progression. Understanding that career advancement can be more fluid and dependent on various factors within the organization is crucial.

Working with diverse teams is another key difference. In academic or clinical settings, you are often surrounded by peers with similar goals and backgrounds. In contrast, the workplace features colleagues of various ages, backgrounds, and levels of experience. Learning to navigate and collaborate within such a diverse environment is essential for success.

Additionally, the shift from focusing on individual achievements to working towards shared goals can be significant. While your academic or clinical work may have centered on personal milestones, professional roles often require collective efforts to meet team and organizational objectives. Balancing personal career advancement with contributing to team success is a critical skill.

Furthermore, the rise of remote work introduces another layer of complexity. Unlike the mostly in-person interactions in academia or clinical environments, professional roles may involve a mix of remote and in-person work. This requires self-discipline, effective communication, and adaptability to manage tasks and collaborate with colleagues effectively.

These differences between the academic and professional worlds can be challenging, but with the right insights and strategies, you can bridge the gap and make a smooth transition into your new role in MSL or medical affairs. Recognizing and preparing for these changes will help you navigate your new career path successfully.

Difference	Academia or Clinical	MSL or Medical Affairs
Structured to Ambiguous	Clear schedules, defined tasks	Ambiguity, fluid timelines

Experienced to Junior Position	Confidence in field	Starting anew, learning curve
Fixed to Fluid Timelines	Set duration for courses	No fixed progression time frame
Homogeneous to Diverse Teams	Similar goals and backgrounds	Varied ages, backgrounds, experiences
Individual to Shared Goals	Personal achievements	Collective targets, team goals
In-Person to Remote Work	Primarily in-person interactions	Mix of remote and in-person work

Table 1. Differences between Academic or Clinical Roles and MSL or Medical Affairs

3. Bridge your gap

Moving from academia or clinical roles to a career as an MSL or in medical affairs presents specific challenges and opportunities in bridging the gap between educational and professional environments. Understanding the differences between your previous roles and the demands of a career in MSL or medical affairs is the first step in this journey. Common challenges faced by new graduates include adapting from the structured nature of academia or clinical settings to the ambiguity of real-world scenarios, shifting into junior positions within pharmaceutical or healthcare companies, and adjusting to the absence of fixed progression timelines inherent in these industries.

The second step is accepting that challenges are inherent to the learning process and that mistakes will inevitably occur as you acclimate to your new role. Reflecting on your progression to college or university, you likely experienced discomfort initially, but with time, you adapted and thrived. The same applies to your professional journey in the specialized field of medical science and pharmaceuticals.

Thirdly, focus on practicing and applying your scientific knowledge and communication skills while continually seeking opportunities for growth and development within the context of medical research, product development, and regulatory compliance. It’s essential to push beyond your comfort zone to build a strong professional brand and contribute meaningfully to the advancement of medical science and patient care.

The fourth stage involves implementing a review process specific to the intricacies of the MSL or medical affairs role. This includes tracking your interactions with Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), evaluating the effectiveness of scientific presentations, and staying abreast of the latest advancements in medical research and regulatory requirements. By dedicating time each week to evaluate your performance, identify areas for improvement, and refine your approach, you’ll gradually bridge the gap.

Awareness of the unique challenges inherent in the MSL or medical affairs role, acceptance of mistakes is part of the learning process. Focused practice and application of scientific and communication skills and continuous improvement through regular review are the key steps in successfully migrating from academia or clinical roles to a career in the specialized field of medical science and pharmaceuticals. Reflect on how you can incorporate these steps into your own career journey to maximize your impact and fulfillment in this dynamic and rewarding field.

Developing a Transition Success Mindset

Mastering the shift from academia or clinical roles to medical affairs or MSL involves navigating through three essential stages to foster success. Firstly, understanding the transition curve is crucial, mapping out the journey from unfamiliarity with skill gaps to unconscious competence. Secondly, embracing a resilient mindset becomes fundamental, allowing one to weather challenges and setbacks with adaptability and determination. Lastly, honing your competitive edge through continuous learning and skill development solidifies your ability to thrive in the competitive landscape of professional transformation.

1. Learn the transition curve

Adapting to a career change requires developing a transformation success mindset. Just like learning to drive or mastering a musical instrument, advancing into your first professional role follows a similar curve of development. Understanding this adaptation curve is crucial for navigating the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Recognize the four key quadrants of skill development (Exhibit 1): unconsciously incompetent, consciously incompetent, consciously competent, and unconsciously competent.

1. Unconscious incompetence: You are unaware of your lack of knowledge.
2. Conscious incompetence: You recognize your lack of knowledge, making every task seem challenging.
3. Conscious competence: You have acquired some knowledge and are aware of it, but still need to concentrate to

perform tasks effectively.

4. Unconscious competence: You perform tasks proficiently without conscious effort, focusing instead on mastery, expansion, or instructing others.

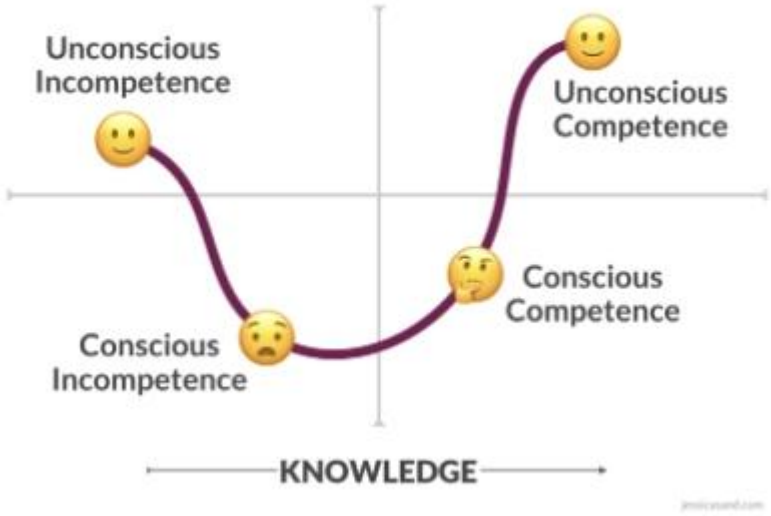

Exhibit 1. The four phases of skill development

In the initial phase, you may feel excited and eager to start, unaware of the knowledge and skills you lack (unconsciously incompetent). As you delve deeper into your role, you become aware of the gaps in your knowledge and skills, which can be uncomfortable (consciously incompetent). Embrace this discomfort as a natural part of the learning process, knowing that it's essential for growth and development. With practice and dedication, you gradually progress to the consciously competent stage, where you start to feel more comfortable and confident in your abilities. Finally, through experience and feedback, you reach the stage of unconscious competence, where you operate effectively and confidently in your role without needing to consciously think about it.

Understand that moving through these stages takes time, commitment, and practice. Acknowledge the emotions you may experience along the way, such as excitement, fear, anxiety, and joy. Recognize that discomfort and challenges are necessary for growth and mastery. Trust the process and have patience with yourself as you navigate each stage of development.

Reflect on your current stage in the transition curve and identify areas for improvement. Set goals and strategies to move through each phase, focusing on acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills, and relationships. Embrace opportunities for learning and development, whether it's through additional responsibilities, projects, or new roles. Understand that the progression curve is not linear and may restart as you encounter new challenges or opportunities in your career.

By developing a transformation success mindset and understanding the stages of development, you can navigate the evolution from academia or clinical roles to a career in MSL or medical affairs with confidence and resilience. Embrace the journey and remember that each phase brings you closer to mastery and success in your new role.

2. Adopt a resilience mindset

Pursuing a career in MSL or medical affairs necessitates adopting a resilience mindset. Imagine you're working on a critical project in your new role as an MSL. The project is complex, with tight deadlines and high expectations. Despite your best efforts, you encounter unexpected challenges that threaten the project's success. In such moments, resilience becomes indispensable. Resilience means not only navigating through obstacles but also leveraging them as opportunities for growth and improvement. For instance, when faced with unexpected setbacks, a resilient MSL would adapt their approach, learn from the experience, and emerge stronger and more capable. This ability to bounce back from adversity and turn challenges into opportunities is fundamental in the fast-paced and dynamic field of medical affairs. Developing a resilience mindset empowers MSLs to overcome hurdles, excel in their roles, and ultimately make a significant impact in the healthcare industry. Consider your own resilience levels for a moment. Is this an area you've developed, or is this a skill you want to work on, to help create a strong professional image? The good news is you can develop resilience. So, wherever you are right now on the scale, you can always enhance your resilience skills.

3. Develop Your Edge

Shifting careers entails developing your edge, marked by confidence, adaptability, positivity, perspective, mastery, and stamina. Picture someone in your professional circle who exudes confidence, handles challenges adeptly, and radiates positive energy – that's the unique edge you strive for. Developing this edge begins with cultivating a success mindset, anchored in the six pillars of the resilience edge framework. Confidence is nurtured by leveraging strengths and acquiring new skills, while adaptability thrives in embracing change and learning. Maintaining a positive outlook fosters relationships and facilitates growth, while seeking diverse perspectives fuels creativity and innovation. Mastery is attained through continuous improvement and goal-setting, while stamina ensures resilience amidst career fluctuations. Embracing these pillars empowers you to shape your professional image and achieve success in your career journey. Reflect on which pillars resonate with you and identify areas for further development to enhance your professional image.

The Six Pillars of Resilience framework are:

1. Confidence
2. Adaptability
3. Positivity
4. Perspective
5. Mastery
6. Stamina

Adapting to the New Environment

Switching jobs requires adept adaptation to the new environment while crafting a professional image. To begin with, understanding the culture of your new workplace is crucial. Take time to observe norms, values, and communication styles. Next, strive to avoid cultural mistakes by remaining open-minded and respectful of differences. Maintain professionalism in all interactions, from communication to attire. Start with a plan to outline goals and objectives for your transition period. Lastly, optimize your first three months by focusing on building relationships, learning, and contributing value. Lastly, build a strategy for long-term success, considering career goals and developmental opportunities within the organization. By adhering to these steps, you can effectively navigate the transition and establish a strong professional presence in your new role.

1. Understand the Culture

Embarking on a career in MSL or medical affairs from academia or clinical backgrounds requires a nuanced understanding of organizational culture to effectively enhance your professional image. Consider moments when you've entered a new environment and immediately felt a sense of belonging or, conversely, sensed a misalignment. This reaction often stems from the organization's culture, encompassing shared beliefs, values, behaviors, and norms. Understanding this culture is pivotal for a successful transition. Your professional image must resonate with the organization's ethos, mirroring your values, strengths, and work style. Research and inquiry play key roles in this process. Explore company materials, such as websites and press releases, and engage in dialogue to uncover insights into the organization's culture, leadership dynamics, and core values. During your initial months, immerse yourself in the culture, observe how leaders communicate, which behaviors are recognized, and discover the unspoken rules specific to the MSL or medical affairs sphere. Armed with this understanding, you'll be better positioned to tailor your professional image accordingly. Remember, while mastering your role's responsibilities is essential, aligning with the organizational culture is equally vital. If the culture doesn't resonate with your values, use this time to evaluate if it's the right fit for your career aspirations. Ultimately, clarity on the organizational culture empowers you to navigate your career journey with confidence and make informed decisions as you progress in the MSL or medical affairs field.

2. Avoid cultural mistakes

Moving from academia or clinical roles to a career in medical affairs or MSL necessitates a keen awareness of organizational culture to effectively craft a professional image. Joining a new organization is akin to immersing oneself in a unique social ecosystem filled with its own norms, values, and behaviors. Much like navigating a new social environment, understanding and adapting to the organizational culture is essential to success. Researching and comprehending the intricacies of the company's culture allows for informed adjustments in behavior and interaction. Initially, it's prudent to exercise caution, erring on the side of conservatism until one has acclimated to the cultural nuances. Inevitably, mistakes may occur, but these should be viewed as opportunities for growth and learning. Embracing challenges as learning experiences fosters professional development and enhances adaptability. By proactively preparing for the cultural shift, individuals can build confidence and competence, ensuring a seamless integration into their new role in medical affairs or MSL.

3. Be a professional

Navigating the transition from academia or clinical roles to positions in medical affairs or MSL involves cultivating a professional image tailored to the demands of these roles. Central to this endeavor is a complex understanding of professionalism. This encompasses not just how one acts or communicates but also the ability to authentically represent oneself while aligning with organizational norms. New graduates are often advised to focus on several key areas upon entering a new role. Firstly, they should be mindful of phone etiquette, avoiding excessive personal phone use during work hours to project engagement and focus. Dress code is another critical consideration, with individuals encouraged to inquire about organizational expectations and err on the side of formality when in doubt. Punctuality is also emphasized, as arriving early for work and meetings demonstrates reliability and respect for colleagues' time. Additionally, prudent use of social media during work hours and adherence to communication norms, both verbal and written, are essential aspects of professionalism. Seeking feedback from peers and supervisors can provide valuable insights into areas for improvement, facilitating the development of a professional image that resonates with organizational culture and expectations. By attending to these facets of professionalism, individuals can navigate the change successfully and establish themselves effectively in their new roles.

4. Start with a plan

Having a strategic plan tailored to the demands of the role and integrating SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) objectives for optimal effectiveness is key. Crafting a comprehensive transition plan involves specific objectives and actions designed to facilitate a smooth adjustment. For instance, setting SMART goals for the initial weeks, such as conducting thorough literature reviews on assigned therapeutic areas, familiarizing oneself with product portfolios, and scheduling meetings with KOLs to establish relationships, ensures a focused approach. Collaborating with MSL managers to refine the plan according to organizational objectives enhances alignment and effectiveness. Additionally, implementing regular performance reviews allows for ongoing evaluation and adjustment based on progress and feedback. For example, weekly assessments of interactions with KOLs and feedback from internal stakeholders enable proactive refinement of strategies. By diligently updating and adhering to the plan, individuals demonstrate their commitment to professional growth and organizational success. This proactive approach not only facilitates seamless integration into the MSL role but also cultivates a positive professional image, showcasing initiative and dedication to advancing medical science and healthcare.

Remember to also incorporate your professional development plans into your SMART goals, a step often overlooked yet crucial as you navigate your career journey. It's imperative to do this early on.

5. Optimize your first three months

Optimizing your first three months to establish a strong professional image can make a lasting impact in your new role. The initial 90 days are crucial as they shape the perceptions your manager and colleagues have of you. During this onboarding period, it's essential to accelerate your learning by immersing yourself in understanding the company's culture, the expectations of your role, and the specific therapeutic areas you'll be focusing on as an MSL. Identifying opportunities for early wins, such as providing valuable insights during medical conferences or contributing to scientific presentations, can enhance your credibility and demonstrate your ability to make meaningful contributions to the team. Additionally, building strong relationships with key stakeholders, including healthcare professionals (HCPs) and internal colleagues, is vital for establishing yourself as a trusted and reliable resource in the field. Proactively seeking mentorship from experienced MSLs or medical affairs professionals, soliciting feedback on your performance, and establishing a support network within the organization can further support your success during this critical period. By focusing on these key areas and developing a strategic plan tailored to the demands of the MSL role, you can effectively navigate the transition and lay the foundation for a successful career in medical affairs.

6. Build a strategy

Having a strategic approach to cultivate a professional image tailored to the demands of these positions is crucial. Building a strategy is the final and perhaps most crucial step in this transition. Your career strategy encompasses more than just setting goals; it is being in alignment with the company vision, their mission and your career mission, and your working blueprint. Developing your strategy sets you on a clear, strong path as you embark on your journey in MSL or medical affairs. While goals are a part of your strategy, they are not its entirety; your strategy is a longer-term plan. It is advisable to wait until after your first 90 days in a new role before crafting your career strategy, as this allows you to gain insight into specific challenges you may face. Once you reach this milestone, it's time to focus on building your strategy tailored to the intricacies of an MSL or medical affairs role.

Start by considering your vision aligned with the company for a significant period, such as three, six, or 12 months. The vision of the corporation as given by your leaders should address a specific challenge or goal pertinent to your role, such as establishing strong KOL relationships or effectively communicating scientific data to healthcare professionals. Next, delve into the

mission—why do you want to achieve this vision? Connect with the emotional core of your company's mission, as it will drive you forward through obstacles unique to the MSL or medical affairs domain.

With a clear understanding of the company's vision and mission, you can set tangible and achievable goals directly related to them. Specify what you want to accomplish in your role, whether it's expanding your scientific knowledge in a specific therapeutic area or enhancing your presentation skills for medical conferences. Outline the tactics you will use to achieve each goal, considering the nuances of the MSL or medical affairs function. For example, if the vision is to establish strong KOL relationships, your tactics may involve attending key medical conferences, organizing advisory board meetings, or conducting one-on-one interactions with healthcare professionals.

Finally, measurements for each tactic to track progress and ensure completion will be established. Key performance indicators (KPIs) will be determined relevant to your goals, such as the number of KOL engagements per month or the successful execution of medical education programs. It is essential to treat your strategy planner as a living document, reviewing and updating it regularly to stay focused and create tangible outcomes aligned with the expectations of an MSL or medical affairs professional. By following this strategic approach tailored to the intricacies of the role, you can effectively navigate the change with your manager and build a successful career in the dynamic field of Medical Science Liaison or medical affairs.

Conclusion

As you embark on your journey into the realms of MSL or medical affairs corporate world, the significance of enhancing your professional image cannot be overstated. Moving forward into these fields demands more than just a change of scenery; it requires a meticulous crafting of your professional persona to align with the expectations and standards of the industry. From understanding the cultural nuances to optimizing your first three months, every step is vital in building a strong professional image. By embracing the transition curve, adopting a resilience mindset, and crafting a strategic plan, you can navigate this journey with confidence and emerge successful in your new role. Remember, the journey from the campus to the office is not just about reaching your destination; it's about the growth and development you experience along the way.

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Dr. Abunto is a medical doctor with over 20 years of clinical research experience. She received her Doctor of Medicine at the University of the East and served as a Family Medicine Medical Director. Dr. Abunto completed her Master of Public Health as Magna Cum Laude from the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health. She assumed a position as an Epidemiologist at the National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Aging at the Laboratory of Epidemiology and Population Science, conducting colorectal cancer research in collaboration with the National Cancer Institute. Currently, Dr. Abunto is the Regional Medical Science Liaison Leader for the Northeast at Exact Sciences.

Maria is an advocate for cancer screening and prevention as a member of the Pennsylvania Cancer Coalition, Ohio Partners for Cancer Control, and American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. She holds leadership positions as a committee leader for Women's Rights for the American Public Health Association, health advocate for the American Heart Association, advisor for Bridging the Gaps Pittsburgh, and mentor for the MSL Society and the University of Pittsburgh Alumni Association. Dr. Abunto is

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Dr. Abunto is recognized for excellence in the MSL profession as the recipient of the prestigious Exact Sciences Medical Affairs 2021 Award of Excellence, the Medical Science Liaison Society 2021 MSL of the Year USA, and 2020 MSL Rookie of the Year USA Finalist. She is an author of the MSL Journal of the MSL Society and is a national speaker for the American Cancer Society, Physicians Helping Physicians, Women in Bio Pittsburgh, Doctor's Crossing Podcast, and the MSL Talk Podcast.

5 Motivational Tools for Sites in Medical Liaison Communication in Multinational Multicenter Randomized Clinical Trials

By Svyatoslav Milovanov | Summer 2024

The process of enrolling patients in clinical trials and ensuring their continued participation is known as recruitment and retention, respectively. These are critical components of clinical trials that must be carried out strictly according to protocol in order to be successful. Any deviation from the protocol can lead to partial or complete failure of the trial. Despite numerous strategies for maintaining these processes, the failure rate in clinical trials remains high, with up to 86% failing during the enrollment phase and up to 15% of patients dropping out of the study.

Very well known, when assessing the expected recruitment of patients on teleconferences on current operational tasks, mention that sites represented by the main investigator give numbers for patient recruitment to get into the study, and after the start of the study, patient recruitment does not occur. In other words, the investigator is saying one thing, but in fact no one (neither the monitors nor the sponsor) expects this, that is, uncertainty remains and there is no leverage for sites to say a patient recruitment figure that is close to the truth. Even an investigator's figure of expected recruitment must be an integral element combining his experience in many fields – treatment, clinical trials, administrative, patient's communication etc. There is no approach that allows to transform the integral, but still subjective assessment of the patient population by the main investigator into an objective one (objectivize) and preserve integrity.

Patient enrollment in clinical trials is essential and this is one of the key factors, especially in the initial stages of a clinical trial. The consistent flow of patients into the study regardless of circumstances is essential for the sponsor, CRO, investigator, and all other parties involved in the study. We also know that while 80% of patients express willingness to participate in a study, only 10% actually do so, and 33% of sites and principal investigators are unable to enroll any patients.
The one way to boost recruitment is only to motivate sites through communication with a person who is also educated like the investigator – the medically-educated medical liaison staff of a sponsor or CRO.

We developed the next motivational tools to boost recruitment:

1. Motivational visits – all sites were visited once right after the start of enrollment in order to address issues and questions;
2. Physician support of some medical aspects of study-specific procedures based on experience from other sites; the sponsor assigned a separately employed physician and each site was visited by this doctor in order to address medical aspects of the protocol;
3. Motivation through fee – each site was proposed to have a few gradual payments per determined period;
4. Motivation through the publication or article – high enrollers were proposed to be an author of upcoming article;
5. Motivation through the conferences – high enrollers were proposed to attend a medical conference per protocol nosology.

Finally, we used these tools for the 4 multinational multicenter studies in oncology and achieved success in recruitment which we elected to share in the professional community.

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Dr. Svyatoslav Milovanov has more than 15 years of Phase I-IV clinical research experience. Graduated in 2000 Dr. Svyatoslav Milovanov as a pediatrician he has been started his work in big regional hospital and worked on pediatrician positon during 7 years combining the job with university duties. In 2003 got a PhD degree. Since 2006 firstly participated I clinical trial as a sub-investigator and since 2007 fully dedicated to Clinical Trial industry on roles of Medical Monitor, CRA, Auditor, Study Physician. Has international certificates of both as a doctor (AKH, CHOP) and clinical trial professional (CRO). In 2021 certified as an oncologist. Member of many professional societies – ACRES, RQA, ESMO. Published more than 80+ scientific articles.

Transforming MSL-KOL Engagement: The Impact of Personalized Content and Digital Innovation

By Prem Sundivakkam | Summer 2024

As the biopharma landscape grows in complexity, MSLs are taking on more complex roles. They are charged with the dual responsibility of gathering insights and disseminating data-driven messages that can influence a range of internal strategies, including clinical development, marketing, and market access strategies. Their presence in the clinical practice is pivotal in enhancing patient treatment outcomes.

Through their close collaboration with Healthcare Professionals (HCPs) and the Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), MSLs acquire a deep understanding of clinical practice in addition to understanding the latest trends and need in the healthcare sector. This knowledge is then channeled back to pharmaceutical companies creating a vital link between scientific research and practical applications. This unique position empowers MSLs to contribute to the creation of innovative therapies that can dramatically enhance the therapeutic landscape.

In specialized fields such as rare diseases and specialty care where personalized medicines and innovative treatment methodologies are abundant, the role of MSLs is particularly significant. With a limited number of specialists in these areas, the role of MSLs is evolving to meet the changing needs of the healthcare landscape. They are becoming indispensable for their expertise in communicating complex scientific information, enhancing patient treatment outcomes, and crafting personalized content based on field insights.

Understanding and Addressing the Unique Needs of KOLs

In the dynamic world of KOLs and expert groups, the landscape is evolving due to generational shifts and technological advancements. As these influencers wield significant power in shaping public opinion and driving trends, understanding their unique needs and perspectives becomes paramount. This understanding not only fosters effective communication but also enables the development of strategies that resonate with their values and aspirations, thereby ensuring a mutually beneficial relationship.

KOLs are showing a strong preference for medical content that is tailored to their professional interests, historical endorsement

patterns, their influence scope, and their understanding of different medical breakthroughs. This trend underscores the importance of a nuanced understanding of the diverse motivational drivers and communication preferences across different KOL segments. This approach ensures that the information provided is not only relevant but also impactful, fostering a deeper engagement between MSLs and the KOLs confirming the shift in landscape towards a more personalized and targeted approach in engaging with KOLs.

The Power of Personalized Content in MSL-KOL Engagement

Personalized content is a major value proposition that MSLs can provide, especially when done with consideration of KOL objectives.

A 2021 survey by MSL Society revealed that 49% of KOLs find scientific updates on new/existing drugs/updates are the most valuable data they acquire during engagements with MSLs (1). This underscores the importance of personalized content in facilitating effective MSL-KOL engagement.

Further, a survey conducted by the MSL Society revealed that 30% of MSL field team members did not know of any barriers to adopting new solutions for personalizing their KOL engagements. This indicates that there is a notable opportunity for MSLs to leverage customized content to enhance their interactions with KOLs.

Personalized content serves as a dual purpose. It addresses medical concerns while also serving as a beacon of hope. By tailoring patient testimonials, success stories, and research insights to align with the interest and concerns of specific patient segments, MSLs can empower and uplift, in addition to informing. Therefore, it is crucial to augment the process of identifying, connecting, and sharing targeted content for effective MSL-KOL engagement.

Enhancing MSL-KOL Engagement: The Integral Role of Digital Tools in Personalized Communication

Digital strategies and tools have transitioned from being mere supportive elements to becoming the backbone of the MSL practice. These tools, including advanced ones like GenAI, are instrumental in enhancing MSL-KOL engagement by facilitating the creation of near real time personalized content tailored to individual KOLs. The main purpose of these tools lies in expanding the reach of MSLs and delivering customized messages, rather than replacing field teams.

The digital tools enable MSLs to distill complex scientific information into easily understandable bite size content, thereby fostering clearer communication with KOLs, and improving retention of information. This not only strengthens the MSL-KOL relationship but also ensures that the most accurate and pertinent information is conveyed, thereby promoting evidence-based decision-making in healthcare.

As we venture into the future, the cutting-edge technologies such as GenAI and Machine Learning (ML) is set to revolutionize the capabilities of Medical Affairs organizations (2). These tools will enable the processing and interpretation of vast data volumes, thereby empowering MSLs to delve deeper into the preferences and needs of KOLs.

In the context of personalized content creation, this technological evolution represents a paradigm shift. The potential of GenAI to transform the landscape is immense. By harnessing the power of GenAI, MSLs can proactively tailor their engagement strategies, ensuring their approach remains not only informed but also relevant.

Challenges and Solutions in Personalized Content Creation

Creating personalized content for effective MSL-KOL engagement is a complex task. The process involves understanding customer data, integrating technology, and maintaining relevance, among other factors. Despite these challenges, the benefits of personalized content, such as increase engagement and customer satisfaction, make it a worthwhile endeavor.

Specific challenges include, but are not limited to:

1. **Data Collection and Analysis:** Personalized content requires a deep understanding of customer data, segmentation, and personalization technology. Collecting and analyzing this data can be a complex and time-consuming process.
2. **Technology Integration:** Integrating personalization technology with existing systems can be a complex task. It requires technical expertise and can involve significant time and resources.
3. **Generic Digital Content:** According to research by McKinsey research, two-thirds of medical professionals complain they are bombarded with generic digital content and are seeking more personalized, tailored, and user-friendly information (3).

4. **Maintaining Relevance:** Personalized content needs to be constantly updated to remain relevant. This requires ongoing data collection and analysis, as well as a flexible content strategy.
5. **Scalability:** Creating a truly personalized experience for every customer can be difficult to scale. It requires sophisticated algorithms and a significant amount of data processing power.
6. **Lack of Integrated Platform:** There can be challenges in implementing modular content, including the lack of an integrated platform for creating scientific and medical modular content that caters to the needs of medical affairs. Careful content planning is needed to identify the required deliverables and key content pieces within them.

These challenges highlight the need for a well-planned and executed personalization strategy.

A Collaborative Approach to Personalized Medical Content Creation

The creation of personalized content is a collaborative effort that requires the expertise and input of various internal stakeholders. The scientific communications team and MSLs play a pivotal role in this process.

The scientific communications team brings their expertise in content creation, understanding of the target audience, and knowledge of the latest trends and technologies in medical communication. On the other hand, MSLs, with their deep understanding of the medical landscape, patient needs, and scientific research, provide valuable insights that guide the content creation process.

This collaboration ensures that the content created is not only scientifically accurate but also tailored to the needs and preferences of the target audience. It enhances the effectiveness of the content, making it more engaging and impactful.

Collaborative opportunities within the medical affairs functions include:

1. **Content Planning:** The scientific communications team and MSLs can work together to plan the content. This includes identifying the key messages, the target audience, and the best channels for dissemination.
2. **Content Creation:** MSLs can provide the scientific expertise needed to create accurate and relevant content. The scientific communications team can then use their skills to present this information in a way that is engaging and easy to understand.
3. **Content Review:** Before the content is disseminated, it can be reviewed by both teams to ensure its accuracy and relevance.
4. Feedback and Improvement: Following dissemination of the content, both teams can collaborate to collect feedback and enhance the content. This process may involve analyzing engagement metrics, conducting surveys, or engaging in discussion with the target audience.
5. **Leveraging Technology:** Use technology to deliver personalized content. This could include mobile apps, interactive websites, virtual reality, and more. The choice of technology should be based on the preferences of the HCPs. Provide training to MSLs on omnichannel communication options to confidently assist HCPs in navigating different sources.
6. **Metrics and Evaluation:** Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the content through metrics such as engagement rates, feedback from HCPs and MSLs, etc. This can provide insights for continuous improvement.

Remember, the goal is to provide HCPs with the information they need in a format that is easy for them to understand and use. This can help in enhancing their knowledge, improving patient care, and ultimately leading to better health outcomes. The future of MSL-KOL engagement hinges on the impact of personalized content and the efficient use of digital tools like GenAI, a goal that can be accelerated through collaboration between scientific communications and MSL teams.

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Robin Klasek is an experienced Organ Transplant Clinical Pharmacist based in Boston, MA. In 2021, he transitioned to the role of Medical Science Liaison for Rare Diseases and Transplant, where he demonstrated a profound interest in medical communications and the utilization of advanced technology to enhance messaging. Robin is known for his dedication to cross-functional collaborations and his keen eye for process improvements. Currently, he has embraced a new role in Medical Communications and Scientific Training, continuing to leverage his expertise to drive innovation and excellence in the field.