

Making every interaction count: the importance of patient-centric sales rep training



As access to healthcare professionals (HCPs) continues to become ever more restricted, equipping medical sales representatives with relevant knowledge is essential for making the most of each and every interaction. E-learning platforms for medical sales representatives have been around for many years, but tailoring these programmes to focus on patients provides an opportunity for pharmaceutical companies to become truly patient-centric

HCPs are faced with the challenge of having to see more patients than ever in an increasingly shorter space of time. As the healthcare environment becomes more complex, the importance of continuing medical education (CME) combined with updates from industry has never been greater. Yet these two important resources for HCPs continue to be squeezed. In order to leverage the limited access they have to HCPs, medical sales representatives must provide value through meaningful conversations. This involves condensing the vast amount of information available through multiple channels, and tailoring it to the HCPs' needs. If HCPs believe they are getting value from a medical sales representative, they will be more willing to have further face-to-face interactions.

Product knowledge is key for all medical sales representatives. But to effectively communicate the brand messages, reps must also have an all-encompassing knowledge of the disease processes, outcomes and interventions, and how the company's own product fits within the competitive landscape. Such thorough understanding boosts confidence, increases belief in the product and builds trust with HCPs.

Training medical sales representatives through e-learning platforms is becoming increasingly popular in the pharmaceutical industry. There are clear benefits over traditional classroom-based learning, including the ability to train the global sales force in a consistent fashion and at a convenient time. E-learning also provides the flexibility to build training in an easy-to-digest format. The role of medical communications agencies is to create comprehensive, engaging and interactive e-learning training programmes, tailored to the needs of the pharmaceutical company and their product.

So what makes an effective e-learning training programme? To put it concisely, it should communicate the scientific background of a disease and product, simplifying scientific complexities and translating them into an easy-to-digest and engaging format. This provides medical sales representatives with a thorough understanding, allowing them to communicate product information in a meaningful way.

Patient-centricity is becoming an increasingly important aspect for pharmaceutical companies. As a medical

communications agency, Synergy Vision have created e-learning programmes that focus on improving outcomes for patients by tailoring programmes around 'patient journeys'. This type of innovative training programme not only has the potential to provide a comprehensive understanding of disease processes, outcomes and interventions, but also and perhaps more critically, relays the feelings and emotions of patients at each stage of their journey.

Given the often complex nature of treatment pathways, patient journeys can be designed to allow learners to understand the scientific and commercial aspects, based on variables such as time of diagnosis and patient status. Journeys are tailored to the product, choosing patient characteristics and treatments which will optimise learning outcomes. This ensures medical sales representatives have a well-rounded understanding of the disease, from the first signs and symptoms to the final end-of-life care a given patient may receive.

This type of patient-centric format allows medical sales representatives to:



- Understand the science behind each of the treatment options in the patient journey
- Recognise patient decisions and emotions as part of the patient journey
- Identify key decision triggers for HCPs
- Assimilate all elements to formulate their sales dialogue.

Video vignettes of patient and physician interviews to clarify or highlight specific learnings in the patient journey can also be used to reinforce specific information. These can provide a comprehensive analysis for the learner, further build on the idea of keeping the patient at the forefront of the picture and provide ongoing opportunities for learners to fully understand the patient journey from multiple perspectives, thereby reinforcing key learnings over time. These interviews can be broken

down and included in the relevant sections of the training programme to assist in conveying the key information from all relevant stakeholders throughout the patient journey.

With respect to assessment, evaluations at the end of each module ask direct questions and 'what if' case scenarios can also be used to evaluate learning outcomes. These provide a checkpoint, ensuring only learners with the right amount of knowledge are able to progress or complete the course. They also provide interactivity for the user, as training modules can be broken up by questions to test their knowledge.

In recent years, new ways of incorporating patient-centricity into e-learning have emerged to help align training with the business model

of pharmaceutical companies. As a medical communications agency, we can work in partnership with pharmaceutical companies to develop innovative programmes which put the patient as the focal point. We believe this has great potential to improve learning outcomes and create a synergy with many pharmaceutical companies' pledge to become more patient-centric.

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