

## Conference Highlight Reprint # 41-04

### Motivating & Retaining the MSL: What Makes MSLs Tick

By Douglas L. Wicks

If every medical science liaison (MSL) job is a self-portrait of the person doing it, Erin Albert, R.Ph, MBA, is autographing her work with excellence. Albert is an experienced and successful MSL for Sepracor in the Indianapolis, IN area. In addition, she has spent a considerable amount of time researching and gathering psychometric data about her peers' job satisfaction in their current MSL roles. Her findings appear in venues such as The Medical Science Liaison Quarterly (MSL Quarterly) ([www.mslquarterly.com](http://www.mslquarterly.com)) and her annual Medical Liaison Job Satisfaction Survey is in queue for its third release shortly. This survey continues to be a growing benchmark within pharma for overall evaluation of the many drivers that motivate, frustrate, inhibit, but most importantly, fulfill MSLs from an overall career vantage point.

#### Retention, Retention, Retention

The overall cost of losing highly specialized field talent dips into all areas of a company's bottom line no matter what the economic landscape holds. MSL retention and pharma's ability to foster "corporate allegiance" among MSLs, therefore, are top of mind these days.

More and more pharma companies are vying for a limited pool of candidates possessing very desirable skills sets. MSLs combine credentialed scientific training with clinical application and business savvy. It's no wonder that they are continually approached by recruiters, pharma-direct contacts and, at times, their peers, for job opportunities. In many instances, offers are for considerably more pay and maybe in more clinically innovative fields. Finding a new job for MSLs has never been easier.

#### Who's Responsible?

Where does responsibility lie for motivating and retaining MSLs? The answer, according to Albert, is multifactorial. While 50% of work life

satisfaction is determined by the relationship an employee has with his/her immediate manager, the balance of MSL job satisfaction can be found within MSLs themselves according to Albert. Corporate culture, individual aptitude and willingness to assume risk, intellectual challenge and flexible scheduling are top drivers that motivate and influence MSL satisfaction.

#### Survey Results

"It's not always about the money," says Albert. Only 11% of those MSLs surveyed in 2004 indicated that financial compensation was a key contributor to overall job dissatisfaction.

Perhaps the most critical element in fostering a positive working environment, and ultimately job satisfaction, lies in establishing clear lines of opportunity for career advancement and development.

When polled as to where each would like to further themselves within each of their respective organizations, only about one third of MSLs responded that they would like to stay in the same area and in the same therapeutic discipline. Another 18% of MSLs responded, "I don't know" according to Albert's survey results.

It is incumbent therefore upon MSL management to create a challenging and foreseeable career path for MSLs. Short term assignments, special in-house management projects and geographical repositioning (AKA 'repotting') are various methods of providing MSLs an ability to explore additional career pathways and gain networking opportunities access across organizational lines.

MSL retention and overall job satisfaction hinges on a variety of interpersonal and organizational factors. Providing MSLs every opportunity to gain exposure within a pharma organization will encourage better understanding of the options open to them. MSLs should be more fulfilled and

less inclined to leave their current positions and organizations along the way.

Companies that retain valued field-based MSL talent will “continue to possess a competitive advantage” according to Albert, and furthermore set themselves apart from others as valued healthcare organizations fully committed to maximizing human resources and motivation to improving patient care.

For a full view of the most recent MSL satisfaction survey, please log onto <http://www.mslquarterly.com>.

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### Publisher & Executive Editor

**John Mack**  
VirSci Corporation  
[www.virsci.com](http://www.virsci.com)  
PO Box 760  
Newtown, PA 18940  
215-504-4164, 215-504-5739 FAX  
<mailto:editor@pharmamarketingnews.com>

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