

Conference Highlight Reprint # 57-04

MSL Roles & Goals

By **Neil H. Gray**, Managing Partner, Healthcare Trends & Strategies, LLC

Medical Science Liaisons (MSLs) today face unprecedented challenges in developing and managing strong clinically-focused relationships with key opinion leaders (KOLs). Many presenters at a recent CBI Annual Forum on Field-Based Dissemination of Scientific Information held in Philadelphia spoke candidly and openly about these challenges and how they are being met by the industry.

Attendees of this forum also heard from experts about organizational and legal issues affecting today's MSLs as well as thoughts about involving MSLs earlier—and differently—within the product lifecycle with R&D. For more information on these issues, please see "The Changing World of MSLs: Determining Value" ([PMN Reprint #55-01](#)) and the Special Supplement: [Key Opinion Leaders, Medical Science Liaisons, & CME](#).

Necessary Tools: Structure, Tracking, and Partnering

In a pre-conference workshop led by Gil Golden, MD, PhD, Director, Medical, Pharmion Corporation, Robin Winter-Sperry, MD, President

and CEO, Scientific-Advantage, and Jan Markind, PhD, Director of Oncology Medical Communications, Novartis, attendees listened to presentations on structuring strategic KOL programs, tools for tracking and building contact management information about KOLs, and effective partnering of the field-based medical group and KOLs. Some attendees also participated in role-playing exercises between a fictitious KOL and MSL.

Golden discussed "influence network mapping" and the strategic use of a physician advisory network to assist medical affairs groups in KOL decision making.

MSLs Need Variety of Talents

Golden acknowledged that today's MSL needs a variety of talents to be successful. "An effective MSL must have not only a strong scientific/clinical background in the therapeutic area," commented Golden, "but also, a congenial and outgoing personality, strong negotiation skills, and the ability to see the future."

Continued on next page...

Departments	Effective Advisory Board Creation and Management	Innovative Strategic and Tactical Marketing Directions	Creative Strategic and Tactical R&D Directions	Enhanced Investigator Recruitment	Enhanced Author Recruitment	Credible Speaker Support	Effective Issues Management	Improved Interactions with Professional Organizations	Improved Patient Advocacy Interactions	Effective Institutional Grant Allocation	Expanded Fellowship Acceptance	Enhanced Impact on Public Policy	Expedited FDA Product Review and Approval
Sales & Marketing	X	X			X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Clinical			X	X	X					X			
Medical Affairs			X	X	X	X				X			
Corporate Affairs							X	X	X			X	X
Investor Relations						X						X	X
R & D			X	X	X					X			
Government Affairs							X		X		X	X	X
Managed Care										X	X		
Professional Relations								X	X			X	
SynerG	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

FIGURE 1: MSLs Are Connected!

To illustrate the interconnectivity of departmental and MSL objectives, Golden shared a grid overlaying typical MSL foci with different pharma disciplines (See FIGURE 1).

No doubt, MSLs play a vitally important role within the industry. "MSLs often work with a product from bench to bedside," noted Winter-Sperry who went on to discuss some specific critical roles MSLs play.

For example, she explained the importance of keeping track of an organization's thought leaders. "How many of you have gone into a company or to visit with a KOL and discovered that a colleague of yours has been in ahead of you?" Dr. Winter-Sperry asked the attendees, noting a situation with which many of the attendees were familiar.

Track Positive Outcomes

Winter-Sperry also spoke of the need to track positive outcomes of MSL/KOL activity, including:

- the scientific discussion of a product,
- clinical information in grand rounds/lectures,
- personal experience with a drug,
- acceptance of a poster/abstract by journal/conference/professional meetings,
- interest in participating in clinical trials or an advisory board,
- sharing competitive intelligence, and
- demonstration of improved patient outcomes.

"Contact management software and relational database systems are useful tools that help MSLs keep track of all this," said Winter-Sperry. [For more information on such systems, see "Thought-Leader Management: A Challenge Met," PMN [Reprint #45-02](#).]

It's All About the Science

Dr. Markind emphasized the importance of maintaining a science-focused discussion with KOLS, as well as the value of including MSL input into the strategic publication planning process.

"The field-based medical group functions as an important bridge between the KOLs and the publication sub team in many organizations," said Markind. "This interaction helps the flow of communication, and therefore, expedites the publication process."

MSLs are also helpful (and should be utilized more) in publication planning due to their:

- Recognition of informational gaps in the public domain
- Ability to create strong relationships with key advocates
- Demonstrated knowledge of the most appropriate congresses/journals
- Identifying the target audience

Better, Earlier MSL/R&D Connectivity

Drew Campbell, PhD, Senior Director, CNS Medical Liaisons, Sepracor, Inc., offered some thoughts on how to develop better (and earlier) MSL/R&D partnerships, by involving the MSL with R&D in advance of Phases II/III. This presentation elicited strong audience discussion and debate on the issue of the role of MSLs in product development.

Campbell advocated early involvement of MSLs in the drug development pipeline to further integration within the company and to imbue MSLs with a feeling of being better connected to the drug development process. Campbell contended that this involvement also increases an MSL's therapeutic area knowledge and enhances thought leader connections early on in development.

According to Campbell, MSL participation in R&D meetings and advisory boards can provide a different perspective on issues than those given by thought leaders. An added benefit, contends Campbell, is MSL professional growth and subsequent improvement in long-term retention.

This earlier interaction benefits both R&D AND Medical Affairs by providing more immediate connection to experts in the field, facilitated corporate visits by thought leaders, better team interactions, technology/technique access, and help in feeding the pipeline. However, Campbell also pointed out that risks exist, including the leaking of confidential information or mishandling thought leader relationships.

Contrasts between MSLs and Sales Representatives

The forum also included lively discussions on the current legal environment facing MSLs.

According to Winter-Sperry, for example, thought leaders are not always aware of current PhRMA guidelines and compliance issues regarding payments to physicians and the separation between promotion and education. Consequently, MSLs absolutely have to be knowledgeable of these guidelines.

Continued on next page...

MSLs and R&D

Preclinical	Clinical
Link with investigators	Suggest investigators for trials
Provide input based upon state of the science	Provide input to development
Offer access to technology/techniques	Supply meeting coverage
Make available competitive intelligence	Nominate consultants for advisory boards

TABLE 1: How MSLs Support R&D

Contrasting MSLs and Sales Representatives

MSLs	Sales Reps
Part of medical or regulatory	Part of sales division
Often have technical background	May have technical background
Customer is KOL	Trained to sell
Not trained to sell	Customer is prescriber
Compensation is not linked to selling	Compensation is linked to product sales

TABLE 2: Contrasting MSLs with Sales Reps

MSLs	Sales Reps
Long term objectives	Short term objectives
Communicate and clarify scientific information to ensure appropriate use of products	Promote safe and appropriate use to drive revenue
Thought leader focus	Prescriber focus
May respond to unsolicited complex questions from HCP	Redirect unsolicited complex inquiries to medical affairs
Performance metrics not based on sales/prescription volume of individual products	Sales/prescription volume-based performance metrics.

TABLE 3: Roles of MSLs vs. Sales Reps in Interactions with Healthcare Professionals

Continued on next page...

Jennifer Romanski, Esq. of Porzio, Bromberg, & Newman discussed the important distinctions between MSLs and conventional sales representatives. She suggested that MSLs should:

- Be neutral scientific experts on a company's products
- Should respond when MDs have technical questions on a company's products or studies
- Not act as a surrogate sales force

Diane Moniz Reed, PharmD, Regional Associate Director, Immunoscience Medical Science Liaisons, US Medical Affairs at Bristol-Myers Squibb Company, emphasized how important it is that KOLs better understand the distinctions between MSLs and sales representatives.

Part of the problem inhibiting MSL/KOL and MSL/Rep interactions to address this problem is lack of time. According to Reed, only about 40% of reps surveyed indicated that they have frequent or occasional interactions with MSLs. What's more, KOLs usually have only 60 minutes per week to speak with MSLs.

Handling Unsolicited Requests by HCPs

Reed strongly encouraged the use of standard operating procedures (SOPs) to handle unsolicited requests for information. SOPs should outline the scope of proactive discussions, materials used during scientific exchanges, role in clinical trial support, scientific publication support/collaboration, CME programs and funding.

When it is appropriate for sales to request MSL visit? What are some pitfalls to avoid? "MSLs are not access tools," Reed reminded the audience. "MSLs should NOT drive sales or otherwise promote products." She also suggested these additional "Not To Do" items for MSLs:

- do not generate noise, buzz or otherwise promote products pre-approval,
- do not proactively discuss off-label information,
- do not make patient-specific therapy or treatment recommendations, and
- do not render general practice related medical, business or billing consultation services.

Reed ended her discussion with this warning: "As the organization gets bigger, the risks get bigger."

Conclusion

As was mentioned during last month's [Pharma Marketing Roundtable discussion](#), the roles and goals of today's MSLs are important, challenging, and very fluid. As more specialty-focused products come to market, and as competition for KOL time becomes more intense among existing MSLs, we can be assured of two things: more emphasis on MSLs solving a wide range of KOL problems, and broader training needs for future MSLs that go beyond clinical data.

Pharma Marketing News

Experts Cited In Article

- **Jan Markind**, Ph.D., Director of Oncology Medical Communications, Novartis, 862-778-8774, jan.markind@novartis.com
- **Diane Moniz Reed**, Pharm.D., Regional Associate Director, Medical Science Liaisons, Immunoscience, Bristol-Myers Squibb Company
- **Robin L. Winter-Sperry**, M.D., President, Scientific Advantage, LLC, 908-204-0995, r.winter-sperry@scientificadvantage.com
- **Neil H. Gray**, Managing Partner, Healthcare Trends & Strategies, LLC, 908 722-1843, graysters@aol.com

Publisher & Executive Editor

John Mack
VirSci Corporation
www.virsci.com
PO Box 760
Newtown, PA 18940
215-504-4164, 215-504-5739 FAX
mailto:editor@pharmamarketingnews.com

Advisory Board

Harry Sweeney
Chairman, CEO, Dorland Global Health Communications
Richard Vanderveer, PhD
Chairman & CEO, V2 GfK