



ANDREW FARIELLO
VP, Global Medical Capabilities,
Oncology, AstraZeneca



ISMA BENATTIA
VP, Europe Medical Affairs,
Amgen



MARY ALICE DWYER, PharmD
MAPS Chair, Executive Program
Committee; Former VP, Global
Medical Excellence, AstraZeneca



CATRINEL GALATEANU, MD
VP, Head of Global Medical Affairs,
UCB



MODERATOR

SAMEER LAL
SVP,
Indegene

Pharma's Medical Affairs (MA) function is not generally associated with driving a positive customer experience, but the pandemic and digital transformation are revolutionizing the role.

While MA has always focused on the healthcare providers (HCPs), now there is the opportunity to take the customers' perspective and uncover ways to better interact with them. The growth of personalization in healthcare delivery and the characterization of individual patients have driven the need to differentiate products based on outcomes and to optimize care delivery. MA's core role in scientific exchange with HCPs and customers, places it in a strategic position, which is driven by HCPs' expectations of high level, non-promotional, and scientific content.

There are multiple avenues where digital transformation can be implemented within an organization to improve customer experience.

MA has the information HCPs need about a medicine's use in a particular patient type. It also has an opportunity to embrace digital solutions from the medical information group or a field medical group and deliver it in the manner HCPs prefer.

"Medical Affairs is the connector between the different functions internally as well as for the ecosystem."

- Isma Benattia

Every function should be looking at digital transformation to improve customer experience, including MA. MA can be the connector between the different functions internally as well as for the wider ecosystem. The pandemic is highlighting the importance of this connector role to ensure continuity of care for patients and sharing information.

The pandemic is creating different ways of working. Customers are adapting and more willing to use new technologies, offering pharma the opportunity to leverage new technologies and provide an omnichannel presence. Customers today engage and interact via a number of mediums as well as channels, and the industry needs to adapt quickly to these changes and be ready for the "next normal."

The fundamental question is – how do we adapt using the new tools available and ensure MA is not exhausting the HCPs and patients with too much information? It must concentrate on supporting physicians with the relevant information they need, when they need it, as well as providing trusted information for patients. Another important angle is how the regulators will examine the new ways of communicating and sharing information with the HCPs and also to support the demand from patients for trusted sources of information.

"A US oncologist survey showed time is key – they are concerned about how much time they have to review data. They need it in the right form. We need to continue to evolve with them."

- Andrew Fariello

Surveys show HCPs still value interaction with the medical science liaison, so MA must establish the best ways to optimize their precious time. HCPs say they want scientific data and trust MA to support them with easily accessible content that

they can digest quickly. Technology is changing how field teams operate. There is greater flexibility and pharma must evolve alongside the HCPs.

What is the blueprint for a good customer experience? Start with the customer and gather insights, through research and individual understanding, to build the physician journey. Understand who they are, what their day looks like, and what they need to achieve. Then collaborate with them to provide useful scientific communications that help to improve patient outcomes. The MA function needs to collaborate both internally and externally to achieve this, gathering data from all sources. Endorsement from the leadership team is important.

The provision of accurate, comprehensive content remains the cornerstone. HCPs need the latest science and those who supply it in a very specific manner for very specific needs will be the differentiators. Data must be made available in modular and accessible forms to educate functions across the organization, and HCPs. Digital is critical for multichannel delivery. The goal is a data-driven customer-centric experience that flows seamlessly across devices. The MA's traditional strengths in medical and scientific knowledge should be enhanced with tailored solutions that extract the right, up-to-date

"Pharma needs to evolve from being a provider of products to a provider of services. We need to focus more on longer term goals and the customer experience in its entirety"

- Mary Alice Dwyer

information from other sources to enhance the dialog. Across companies, the mindset must be to build a customer-centric culture. This means embedding digital in every action, every day, to sustain this.

In addition, measurement is vital. Find out what impact a piece of content is having, as well as which channels, and other means of engagement, are most effective. Maintaining ongoing interactions with customers will provide insights into them and help MA anticipate their needs. Consider how digital solutions can enable better service delivery.

One of the important and most cited challenges to digital implementation is the lack of clarity with regulators, both internal and external. Discussion with internal regulators can help them to understand the goals and smoothen the processes. Silos must be broken down. Externally, pharma companies need to work together and increase opportunities to interact. The industry

must evolve from seeing itself as a provider of products to a provider of services, which will help to broaden the perspective of the world in which we work.

"HCPs want evolution – they trust us and have reliance on us for the data.."

- Catrinel Galateanu

Focus on longer term goals and understanding the customer experience in its entirety. This requires a partnership with HCPs and awareness of where they are going to solve their problems.

MA is one part of the solution. All functions must challenge themselves to break silos and raise standards. The pandemic is accelerating transformation and there is no way back.

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+1 732 750 2901



digitalsummit@indegene.com



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