

# MSL stakeholder engagement: meeting expectations

<https://marketpublishers.com/r/MFBB7F2B3E3EN.html>

Date: June 2017

Pages: 0

Price: US\$ 695.00 (Single User License)

ID: MFBB7F2B3E3EN

## Abstracts

### MSL Stakeholder Engagement–Meeting Expectations

In this report, FirstWord identifies practical solutions to the stakeholder engagement challenges faced by medical science liaisons (MSLs) teams in 2017.

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1. The executive summary, taken directly from the report, presents key findings from the research
2. Research objectives and methodologies employed to produce the report
3. Detailed report contents
4. Why this report is important to you

#### 1.Executive Summary

The need to provide impartial, non-promotional medical and scientific evidence to the medical community is the foundation on which the medical science liaison (MSL) role was built half a century ago. Over the years the role has evolved and matured to meet the changing needs of the pharmaceutical industry and the increasingly complex healthcare environment. Companies have become more aware of how their MSLs can be used strategically and teams have become a lot more focused. MSLs are becoming involved in discussions with stakeholders earlier in the product life cycle and are supporting Phase III studies.

MSLs have now moved into mainstream pharma and become an integral part of the industry, providing a vital link between drug developers and their external stakeholders.

These stakeholders can be broadly categorised into three groups: high-level academic key opinion leaders (KOLs); physicians and other healthcare providers (HCPs) who regularly treat patients; and payers. The particular stakeholder groups on which MSLs focus their interactions will be dependent on the therapy area in which they work and the life cycle stage of the product. Broadly speaking, interactions with KOLs can vary from responding to requests for data clarification to asking for their expert opinion or advice.

Discussions with physicians and other HCPs often revolve around education, such as a detailed data review or explanation of the mechanism of action of a drug. Engagement with payers is more about formulary inclusion and patient access. To meet the expectations of these stakeholder groups more specialised teams have been created, such as those that are dedicated to engagement with specific payers in the complex US healthcare system.

The challenges that MSLs face change depending on the stage of the product life cycle at the time of engagement. Pre-launch, MSLs must have a good understanding of the science and be able to effectively communicate data while remaining compliant with regulations and codes of practice. Post-launch, experts advise that the biggest challenge is still access to physicians for various reasons, ranging from physicians' lack of time to academic institutions that have a closed-door policy to representatives of the pharma industry.

Where access is challenging, it has created new opportunities for MSLs to find creative solutions to reach these stakeholders, including a multichannel approach to engagement. While digital channels can be useful vehicles for sharing information, however, experts highlight that they should be considered as supplementary to developing a personal relationship. Importantly, MSLs are more likely to break down access barriers if they are prepared to meet stakeholders on the latter's terms, whether this is outside of their clinic hours or at medical conferences or educational events.

Having overcome any initial access hurdles, the MSL must provide value if the relationship is to develop. This involves understanding what is valuable to the stakeholder and aligning their needs with the resources available within the company. MSLs must first identify the objectives of the interaction and then plan for an impactful engagement. There is little value in meeting a stakeholder without a clear objective, since this could be viewed as wasting their time and is unlikely to lead to an invitation to return. MSLs must earn the right to be

regarded as a peer. Successful MSLs will not only possess the right knowledge, skills and behaviours – they will respect the stakeholder’s time and expertise. With all the right elements in place, engagement is more likely to be mutually beneficial and contribute to the development of collaborative partnerships that provide value to both the stakeholder and the pharma company

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## 2. Research Methodology and Objectives

This FirstWord Dossier ExpertViews report provides insight into the opportunities that medical science liaisons (MSLs) have for meaningful engagement with external stakeholders, and some of the challenges they face in meeting the expectations of those stakeholders, while also demonstrating value to their internal stakeholders.

Analysis is based primarily on the insights and opinions of medical affairs professionals, MSL managers, MSLs and specialist consultants. The contributors were selected on the basis of their knowledge, experience and expertise and research was mainly via in-depth telephone interviews.

This was supplemented with data from FirstWord’s 25-minute internet-based MSL surveys, the most recent of which was conducted during March and April 2017. The sample distribution was 100 US/EU5-based MSLs and MSL managers who work for pharmaceutical companies ranked in the top 100 by revenue. The breakdown of respondents was as follows:

US – 50

UK – 14

France – 4

Italy – 2

Spain – 20

## Germany – 10

Primary research was complemented with in-depth secondary research across multiple, publicly available sources of information.

Key questions explored in this report include

How has the MSL role evolved and what are the drivers for change?

Which stakeholder groups do MSLs engage with at different stages of the product life cycle, and how have these changed over the last five years?

What are the key engagement challenges that MSLs face with regard to different stakeholder groups and how are teams addressing them?

What communications strategies are proving successful?

What strategies have MSLs found useful for building successful relationships with KOLs and other HCPs?

How is stakeholder feedback collected and what are the challenges in obtaining honest opinions?

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#### 4. Why this report is important to you

MSLs have become a critical interface with KOLs and healthcare practitioners (HCPs). The development of trusted, personal relationships is key to MSL success if they are to deliver scientific data and education to a clinical audience traditionally sceptical of pharma's messages. As the MSL role evolves, how are managers overcoming challenges such as ensuring compliant pre-launch communications, widening post launch KOL/physician access, meeting the needs of new stakeholder groups and proving the value of the MSL team?

This report will enable you to

- Understand how the MSL role has evolved and know what has driven change

- Identify the stakeholder groups MSLs should engage with at different stages in a products life cycle

- Employ the strategies MSLs have found to be most effective for building successful, trusted relationships with stakeholders

- Know which stakeholders are growing in importance for MSLs

- Apply multichannel strategies to expand physician and HCP engagement post-launch

- Find solutions for collecting honest, reliable stakeholder feedback

- Examine current techniques for assessing the performance and value of MSL teams

#### Expert MSL Contributors

The report is informed by the practical knowledge and insights of eight front line experts who work in leading companies such as Sanofi-Genzyme and Allergan.

#### About FirstWord

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