

*This is an article I wrote for a pharmaceutical industry website, about
Pharma's interactions with medical care providers.*

TOPIC: Pharma Messaging to HCPs

How Pharma Needs to Change its Messaging to Healthcare Providers

The past decade has seen a dramatic shift in how everyone communicates. There was already a large shift underway towards digital interactions and processes in the healthcare field, which COVID-19 only accelerated. Besides adjusting their messaging to fit the new electronic norms, Pharma needs to also change the content and structure in their messaging to healthcare providers (HCP). A recent survey showed that dissatisfaction rates ranged from 23% to almost 50% of physicians who were unhappy with Pharma's digital interactions; other communication channels where doctors said they were dissatisfied were marketing emails (46%), telephone sales calls with sales reps (42%) and both webinars and websites (each at 39%).¹

In addition, HCPs are suffering from high burnout rates. An American Medical Association survey of 20,947 physicians and other workers in the COVID-19 era found that 43% suffered from work overload and 49% had burnout.² What this translates to for Pharma is that it needs to change how it messages HCPs to account for these factors. Messaging needs to understand and incorporate modalities that make the most efficient use of HCPs' time and provide information that HCPs find helpful in their clinical practices. Let's look at some ways Pharma can change its messaging to HCPs.

It may seem obvious, but messaging should be in context with the HCP's line of work. It doesn't make sense to message an HCP about complex chemotherapy drugs that are used in the hospital if the HCP has an outpatient-only general medicine practice. Context of an HCP's practice situation and their specialty or subspecialty should influence the specific messaging. Pharma should use accurate data and analytics to identify the particular HCP audience that uses their products. HCPs don't appreciate wasting time sifting through mounds of Pharma information about medications an HCP infrequently, if ever, directly prescribes.

Pharma messaging to HCPs needs to be informative. Messaging that solely focuses on convincing an HCP to prescribe a drug is not likely to go over well. HCPs are interested in messaging that makes good use of their time by educating and informing. If they're going to spend time reading messaging, they want it to have content that helps them provide better care and results in better patient outcomes. Rather than using forceful messaging to persuade HCPs to prescribe their products, Pharma should consider messaging that interests the HCP in the product's clinical benefit and piques the HCP's interest in learning more about the product. An HCP is more likely to be interested in following up on something that has piqued their interest. Messaging that's of interest to the HCP and provides some benefit to them, such as educating them about something directly pertinent to their practice, is much more likely to be well-received.

Timing is also a critical element in Pharma messaging. Pharma should know and understand the workflows of the individual HCPs they message. This ensures that:

- Messaging is delivered at a time of day that's optimal for the HCP to receive it (when the HCP may have less pressing matters)
- The HCP is more likely to be receptive to engaging with the message, and
- The HCP is more likely to absorb and retain the content of the messaging

For example, if an HCP does slower-paced outpatient work but also spends time doing hectic inpatient critical care work, it stands to reason the HCP would be more receptive to messaging while doing the former rather than the latter.

Messaging materials should incorporate simple and eye-catching visual elements when possible. Concise diagrams, charts, and other visual infographic elements can be "read" quickly and are easily retained. On the other hand, long drawn-out text is difficult to read and retain relevant information from. Like most people, HCPs generally are more receptive to information that can be digested easily and quickly.

The practice structure an HCP works in plays a key role in the type of Pharma messaging that's most likely to be effective. According to a recent analysis by the American Medical Association, the majority of patient care physicians work outside of privately-owned medical practices, and 50.2% of all patient care physicians are employees rather than medical practice owners.³ HCPs who are employed are likely to have different needs and interests when it comes to prescribing than HCPs who own their practices. HCPs who are employed, especially by large organizations with highly complex data monitoring systems in place, are often concerned with issues such as prescribing the most cost-effective medications and prescribing drugs preferred by their organization. These HCPs know their employers routinely run data reports that compare prescribing habits of the organization's HCPs, and that such data can affect pay

and annual evaluations. This differs from private practice HCPs, who are not under the same constraints. Pharma messaging to these two categories of HCPs should take these differences into account.

Pharma's messaging to HCPs should also focus on tools to help HCPs in their practices and in interactions with their patients. HCPs are always looking for ways to streamline their workflows and improve their patients' perceptions. Messaging that assists HCPs in these areas can include information about patient medication conversation tools, prior authorization assistance for drugs, and patient financial support for drugs.

Finally, goal alignment is an important element of messaging. HCPs are interested in providing care that improves clinical outcomes and is well-received by patients. To this end, Pharma messaging to HCPs should be aligned with these two primary HCP goals.

In summary, there are multiple ways Pharma can optimally adjust and change its messaging to HCPs. Pharma should adjust multiple parameters of its messaging to stay updated with the needs and preferences of contemporary HCPs. These messaging changes are likely to improve HCP acceptance of, retention of, and action on Pharma messaging.

References

¹ Satisfaction not guaranteed: Doctors disappointed in Pharma's digital pandemic efforts, survey says. <https://www.fiercePharma.com/marketing/satisfaction-not-guaranteed-doctors-disappointed-Pharma-digital-during-pandemic-survey>.

² Half of health workers report burnout amid COVID-19. <https://www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/physician-health/half-health-workers-report-burnout-amid-covid-19>.

³ AMA analysis shows most physicians work outside of private practice. <https://www.ama-assn.org/press-center/press-releases/ama-analysis-shows-most-physicians-work-outside-private-practice>.