A SURVEY OF THREE PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES' RESOURCE UTILISATION IN COPY REVIEW ACTIVITIESAND PROPOSALS FOR BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Promptional and non-promotional materials are highly visible outputs of pharmaceutical companies. They are scrutinised by competitors, agencies and sometimes customers.

Central to nearly all codes and systems are requirements that statements and messages are:
- Consistent with the marketing authorisation;
- Accurate and capable of substantiation;
- Fair, balanced and up to date.

Regional and national differences exist in the regulation of:
- Meetings;
- Gifts, fees, hospitality and travel;
- External approval requirements;
- Dispute resolution.

The UK industry body, ABPI, issued a code of conduct in 1958. Its current form is very similar to the European industry EFPI code.

The aims of this study were to
- quantify time taken up by copy review activities in a sample of UK pharmaceutical medical affairs and commercial functions;
- indentify the origins and consequences of avoidable re-work;
- develop solutions.

We present here the medical affairs results.

METHOD

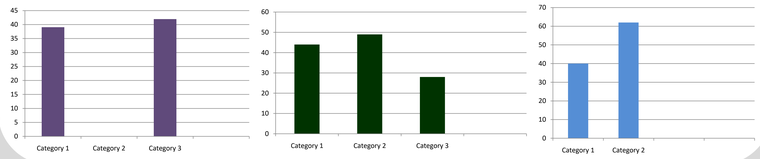
We developed an online survey with three components:

- Retrospective, quantitative estimates of time taken on copy review and numbers of avoidable ideations.
- Ranking the common reasons for avoidable ideations.
- Free text responses describing potential solutions.

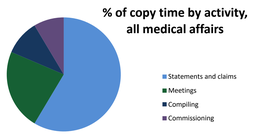
This was sent to 249 staff in three UK pharmaceutical companies in 2013 and 2014.

RESULTS

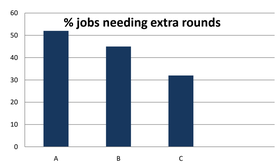
We received 118 usable responses from 249 invitations, a response rate of 47%. 48 responses were from medical affairs and 70 from commercial and other functions. The proportion of the working week spent on copy review by physicians was a consistent 40%. For medical information, the proportion varied between zero and 65%. Scientific advisors spent 0% to 42% of their time on copy activities.



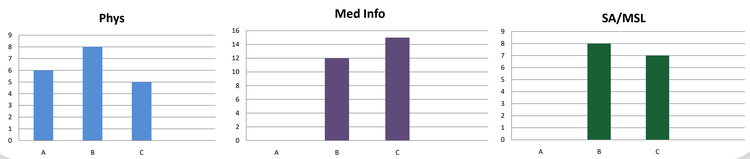
On average just over 50% of time spent on copy activities went on checking scientific statements and claims. The reminder was spent on concept and planning meetings, commissioning, proof reading, compiling materials. Rounds of scheduled review averaged 2.3.



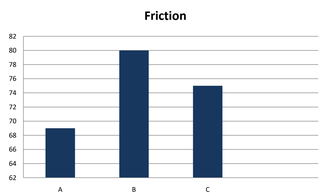
Estimates of the proportion of jobs requiring avoidable rounds of review ranged between 30% and 50%.



This results in between six and eight additional hours work per week...



...and raised levels of friction, reported as 'frequent' or 'common' by 80% in one organization and to a significant level in all three.



Missed deadlines were estimated for around one third of projects.

The three top-ranked reasons for re-work were:
- claims not supported;
- references missing or not marked up;
- differences of option.

Ranked reasons for re-work

A	B	C	
1	1	2	Claims not supportable
2	2	1	References missing or not married
6	3	3	Spelling and grammar
5	7	6	Review criteria changed during project
7	6	7	Layout or presentation

SA
Scientific Affairs

MSL
Medical Science Liaison

Free text proposed solutions from respondents were grouped subjectively into themes.
The three most frequent cited proposals were:
- meetings to discuss materials before copy got into the review cycle;
- improve the scientific accuracy and spelling of copy before review, so that it is right first time;
- insist on consistency between reviewers and between reviews cycles.

CONCLUSIONS

Between one third and one half of the available resource in medical affairs teams in the UK is taken up reviewing materials. This varies between organizations depending upon allocation of this activity. Materials are seen multiple times and a significant proportion of iterations are seen again and again. This causes loss of productivity and internal friction between and within departments. Scientists and physicians engaged in review have positive proposals for process improvement, which are consistent across the organizations involved in this piece of work.

An industry wide prospective survey is necessary to identify actual resource utilisation in this activity and benchmark best vs worst practice. Process improvement interventions could be formally assessed to measure the savings that can be made.

It is likely that three relatively simple actions could save a lot of time.
- Improve the standards of materials entering the review cycle.
- Define and limit responsibilities.

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