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The Pharma-Publisher-HCP relationship: Opportunities to increase the drive for medical advancement

Expert views on what practitioners expect from Pharma and publishers and opportunities for publisher-Pharma collaboration



Overview

Brief blurb

Contributors

1. Understanding the HCP-publisher-Pharma relationship

2. Views of industry experts on practitioners' expectations

- 2.1. Accessibility and affordability
- 2.2. Reliability
- 2.3. Transparency
- 2.4. Relevance
- 2.5. Usability
- 2.6. CME

3. How can Pharma and publishers meet HCPs' expectations?

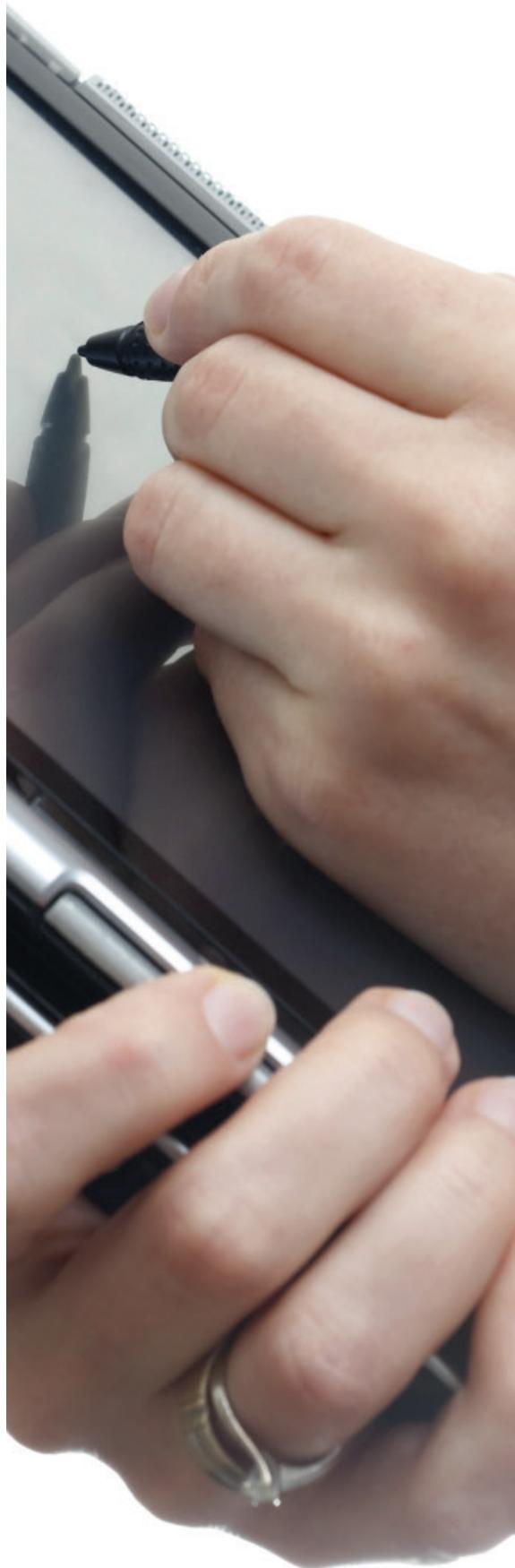
- 3.1. Harness the potential of a Pharma-publisher partnership
- 3.2. Know the practitioner
- 3.3. Make HCPs part of the content strategy
- 3.4. Think beyond the clinical trial or journal article
- 3.5. Increase content discoverability by sharing critical data

4. How will the HCP-Pharma-publisher relationship evolve in the coming years

- 4.1. The rise of alternative content formats
- 4.2. From curating to broadcasting to the HCP and beyond
- 4.3. Increased openness and improved accessibility
- 4.4. Quicker, easier, and more user-friendly systems

5. Key takeaways

References



The relationship between Pharma, publishers and healthcare professional (HCPs) is a critical one which supports the continued drive towards improvements in Healthcare. HCPs require access to critical information around advances in medicine from credible, authoritative sources. Thus, the HCP-Pharma-publisher ecosystem is one where each stakeholder shares a complex, interdependent relationship with the other. This paper focuses on this ecosystem and presents expert opinions on the challenges that HCPs face in accessing essential information. The aim is to understand how publishers can work with Pharma to meet HCPs' expectations, build focused HCP engagement strategies, and identify mutually beneficial opportunities for collaboration.

Contributors

This whitepaper owes a bulk of its content and analysis to the inputs of industry professionals who were keen on sharing their views and opinions on the topics covered in this paper. We'd like to thank the following experts for their valuable inputs and time. The opinions they have expressed here are their own and are not necessarily endorsed by the organizations/institutions that they represent.

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1. Understanding the HCP-publisher-Pharma relationship

The medical and healthcare landscape is dynamic and one that is based on intricate relationships between multiple stakeholders representing different segments such as Pharma, medical and device manufacturers, marketing managers, publication managers, practitioners, care givers, researchers, publishers, academic societies, and so on.

As two of the most influential stakeholders in the biomedical and Pharmaceutical research space, both Pharma and publishers "have vested interest in the publication of high quality research."¹ They are also the two groups with which HCPs closely interact in order to produce or access content. The central driver of the HCP-Pharma-publisher relationship is HCPs' need to access critical information in the form of peer-reviewed journal articles or other types of scholarly communications such as drug information documents, marketing material, continuing medical education (CME), trial data, blogs, and so on. Such information supports the HCPs' goal of "improving the lives of patients through medical advances and enhanced care."²

Given Pharma's position as funders of medical studies and clinical trials, and as generators of medical information, Pharma can give HCPs access to information about the latest developments in their therapeutic area. Meanwhile, as curators and broadcasters of peer-reviewed medical information, publishers can help ensure that the content being disseminated to HCPs is relevant, reliable, easily accessible, and discoverable.

In this paper, we focus on what kind of information HCPs specifically require and on their relationship with Pharma and publishers. We also discuss how publishers can support Pharma in anticipating HCPs' content needs and facilitate the discovery of, and access to, critical medical and healthcare related information.

We present the views of industry experts on the areas in which Pharma and publishers can work together in order to better meet HCPs' expectations and help improve the HCP-Pharma relationship. The observations and suggestions included here hold the key to effective HCP engagement strategies, present significant opportunities for improved collaboration between Pharma and publishers, and highlight areas where Pharma can strengthen their relationship with HCPs.

Why do HCPs rely on Pharma and publishers?

HCPs share an interdependent relationship with both Pharma and publishers. As Donald Samulack, President, US Operations, Editage, Cactus Communications, puts it, "**There is an interwoven web between healthcare professionals, publishers, and Pharma.**" It is an ecosystem, and the structure of the ecosystem almost equally depends upon the input and involvement of each of these stakeholders. In return, each stakeholder draws value from the relationship in a manner that suits each stakeholder's individual need – you can say that it is very much a symbiotic relationship between

each stakeholder pair, and the sum value is greater than the individual contributions."

Both Pharma and publishers meet the content needs of HCPs in distinct ways. For example, Pharma companies help ensure that relevant clinical outcomes, treatment procedures, and drugs are supported, developed, and distributed in the market. They also provide HCPs with "the chance to shape the therapeutic landscape through clinical research programmes and with peer-to-peer learning opportunities."²

Elaborating on the HCP-Pharma relationship, Richard Donnelly – Professor in Medicine at the University of Nottingham and Editor-in-Chief of *Diabetes, Obesity, and Metabolism* – says that HCPs look to Pharma, "for various types of information such as written materials, guidelines, podcasts, videos, etc. This information may not necessarily have been generated by the Pharma company. But the Pharma company might enable the healthcare professionals to have access to some of that material."

Donnelly also explains how practitioners view publishers distinctly from Pharma: HCPs go to publishers "in the same way that they would go to a library, essentially, to try and find reliable information. They will identify with different publication outputs—whether it is an academic journal, a textbook, a separate one-off publication, a clinical guideline, or a document issued by a society but published by a publisher." Scholarly publishers provide HCPs with access to the latest research in their therapeutic area, enabling them to stay updated about the application of treatments in healthcare to improve patient outcomes. By using peer-reviewed journals as the primary medium of disseminating critical findings and groundbreaking discoveries in medical research and practice, publishers ensure the reliability of the findings that they circulate.

Publishers also facilitate the dissemination of critical medical discoveries in niche therapeutic areas through specialist journals that have the advantage of brand reputability. Thus, publishers provide an outlet for Pharma to showcase their research through reliable channels and serve as the go-to source of information for practitioners. Owing to the credibility of information provided by publishers, HCPs have an inherent willingness to engage with, learn from, and apply this content. This gives publishers access to a wealth of valuable insights about HCPs' information consumption behaviors and patterns.

It is therefore essential for both publishers and Pharma to work together so as to not only understand HCPs' needs but also anticipate and meet them. To achieve this, publishers could leverage their access to the latest research and medical breakthroughs and work with Pharma in an advisory capacity to amplify critical research findings and serve HCPs' content needs.



2. Views of industry experts on practitioners' expectations

In the context of the arguments listed above, we approached some industry experts to seek their views on two broad questions: What are some of the challenges HCPs commonly face when searching for content relevant to their practice from Pharma or publishers? And what are their expectations from both stakeholders? The following emerged as key themes during our discussions with them:

2.1. ACCESSIBILITY AND AFFORDABILITY

Often, the content that HCPs would want to rely on, i.e., peer reviewed journal articles, is locked behind subscription paywalls. Since not all HCPs are researchers, they may not have access to the content that they need.³ Julie Newman, Associate Director, Medical Affairs, Australia and New Zealand, at Gilead Sciences, explains, "In Australia, for example, a lot of doctors are public practitioners who are not affiliated with a university, so they don't have subscriptions to journals. They may reach the content they need, a specific study perhaps, but realize they have to pay for it. That makes it difficult for them."

Deb Wyatt, Vice President of Asia-Pacific Society Publishing at Wiley, believes that practicing HCPs expect to be "able to access content seamlessly and without any barriers." Leslie Citrome, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at New York Medical College and Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal of Clinical Practice, argues, "No one is going to want to pay \$30 to access an article behind a paywall. If we look at the music industry, we have opportunities to download music that we like at an affordable rate. We don't have something like that for scholarly medical articles. Individual practitioners cannot afford to subscribe electronically to many journals and cannot afford \$30, \$40, or even more expensive individual downloads of articles."

Donnelly believes that, **HCPs expect Pharma to provide "access to not only clinical trials and clinical research results but also other less quantitative materials such as guidelines, commentaries, reviews, or updates on a particular disease or an area of practice – resources that might not otherwise be freely available to them."** Adding to this thought, Jovelle Fernandes, Vice President, Japan Medical Officer, and Head of Japan Medical Affairs at Takeda Pharmaceuticals, believes that **"timely delivery of relevant medical information is helpful, and that is where HCPs find Pharma companies' insights and information valuable."** Thus, HCPs expect to access medical literature and information without the additional burden of subscription paywalls.

2.2. RELIABILITY

Often, because of the lack of access to their preferred sources of information from Pharma and publishers, HCPs need to be certain of the reliability of the content that they are accessing. However, "An element of trust is not always present," says Citrome. For example, the pressure to publish, increasing journal submission volumes, and the issue of accessibility

have led to the emergence of dangerous trends such as predatory publishing. Predatory publishers lure authors with false assurances of publication and freely disseminate manuscripts without putting them through a rigorous peer review process. As a result, it is not always easy for HCPs to rely on the journal disseminating the information, nor on the peer review process followed to evaluate journal articles.⁴⁻⁸

Donnelly believes that, when accessing content from publishers, HCPs "expect some confidence in the authority, accuracy, and relevance of that content." Similarly, in the case of Pharma, Newman says, "Practitioners expect that the information that's provided by a Pharmaceutical company is accurate, fair, balanced and includes the positives and negatives. They also expect to know how a particular medicine compares to others."

"HCPs expect some confidence in the authority, accuracy, and relevance of content. The publisher will be seen as the gatekeeper who has to ensure the quality and relevance of the information and that it is not in any way misleading or commercially distorted."

Professor Richard Donnelly, Professor in Medicine, University of Nottingham; Editor-in-Chief, Diabetes, Obesity, and Metabolism

Often, the information generated by the Pharma industry is viewed with skepticism because of the fear that it may be commercially driven.^{9,10} This mistrust can be overcome if HCPs have access to all details behind a study. In the Pharma context, Citrome elaborates, this includes adequate information about "the research that was done to support their products, transparency about studies that were not supportive, etc." In the publisher context, Wyatt feels that this applies to "transparency around what the journal practices are for performing peer review and how the editors and publisher will conduct themselves." However, this information may not always be easily available or openly disclosed.

Citrome, who is a practicing physician himself, shares his expectations from Pharma: **"I expect the Pharmaceutical industry to increase their level of transparency and improve the opportunity for engagement of trust. That means adhering to guidance offered by publishers and editorial boards regarding the publication of their research. It means ensuring that trials are registered in relevant clinical registries, and that the studies themselves, when recorded, are consistent with what has been registered."** Citrome emphasizes that the expectation of transparency also applies to negative results.



2.4. RELEVANCE

The ability of HCPs to translate clinical research into practice depends on the extent to which they are able to contextualize the medical information that they receive. According to Wyatt, “**One of the biggest challenges is translating published research into insights that are immediately applicable in the clinical context.** For example, ‘What does this actually mean to me?’ or ‘When I go into the clinic tomorrow and I am meeting with patients, what do I actually need to do?’”

Citrome thinks that “Practitioners expect the different Pharmaceutical companies to provide the information necessary to use their products within the context of illnesses that they are used for.” Newman supports his argument: “When you have the results of a clinical trial, it doesn’t necessarily translate into how that medication works in the real world. You need ways to look at how that information impacts the real world and this is something Pharma can help with.”

2.5. USABILITY

HCPs lead busy lives, working almost up to 80 hours per week,¹¹⁻¹³ and they may not always have the time to go through pages and pages of information about a ground-

breaking study. What they really need is reliable content in user-friendly formats and platforms of their choice.¹⁴ Newman emphasizes that HCPs need “information that’s credible, balanced, and accurate, but it need not always be in the form of a journal article. It could be podcasts, symposium posters, continuous education videos, etc.”

2.6. CME

CME, or continuing medical education, improves the competence of HCPs by equipping them with well-balanced, real-world information that is disease-oriented and aligned to patient needs.^{2,15-17} Fernandes feels that HCPs expect Pharma’s support for “their medical education programs. Pharma companies could partner with societies or academia to provide the necessary funding or support, at an arm’s length.” Donnelly holds a similar view: “HCPs expect Pharma to provide them with relevant CME content. The sort of information that I need to access easily for CME may not be a written text or a written article; it may be a video, podcast, a little training module where I can watch the video, and then I can complete a questionnaire, and an assessment at the end, in order to get a certificate of completion.”

3. How can Pharma and publishers meet HCPs’ expectations?

The challenges outlined by the experts we interviewed indicate that **HCPs need content that is easily accessible, affordable, discoverable, reliable, relevant, available in a user-friendly format and platform, and follows ethical principles of transparency and disclosure.** The only way for publishers and Pharma to begin meeting these needs is by working closely together to “create a customized range of solutions for HCPs.”¹⁴ Listed below are some areas of opportunity for publishers and Pharma to develop their own capabilities, work collaboratively, enter beneficial partnerships, and formulate precise HCP engagement strategies.

3.1. HARNESS THE POTENTIAL OF A PHARMA-PUBLISHER PARTNERSHIP

A Pharma-publisher partnership could help address the information needs of HCPs.¹⁴ Given their role as disseminators of credible information, publishers can present Pharma with several opportunities for collaboration. Sharing an example of how such a partnership could work, Fernandes recommends a shared Pharmapublisher booth at a medical conference or congress. “Why not have a Pharma company and a publisher work together to have a more engaging booth or to share their expertise and deliver information to HCPs in a more interactive manner.”

A Pharma-publisher collaboration could also allow both stakeholders to engage academic and professional societies in healthcare (where a majority of members are HCPs).^{18,19} Other potential areas of collaboration include:

- Providing HCPs with access to reprints of in-demand or highly critical pieces of medical literature, leveraging the publishers’ expertise for content curation and dissemination¹⁴
- Creating enhanced content solutions such as specialty microsites that cater to niche content requirements of Pharma’s target audience – practitioners
- Facilitating data sharing and management through tools and repositories
- Sharing negative results or outcomes
- Focusing on HCP engagement through a planned multichannel approach (e.g., targeted newsletters)
- Creating content in a variety of highly engaging formats such as videos, podcasts, infographics, workshops, webinars, and other training and skill-building resources¹⁴



3.2. KNOW THE PRACTITIONER

According to Fernandes, there is a need for a change in mindset, where both Pharma and publishers “move from a transactional relationship with HCPs to one that is focused on HCP engagement.” Supporting this argument, Wyatt says that both Pharma and publishers need to **“Know what drives HCPs, what motivates them, and what they actually need. Understand the context that they are operating in and listen to them.”** This will help identify the real content needs of practitioners and help find mutually beneficial solutions to meet those needs. One way to do this is by analyzing HCPs’ information seeking behaviors. Newman says, **“You need to know who your audience is and you need to make sure that your content is going to the right people. There is a lot involved in getting your message out, and I think that the publishers can really help the Pharmaceutical company define their audience and reach out to that audience in a credible way.”** Pharma can increase HCP engagement by creating a strategy that enables them to personalize their communication through tools and channels that HCPs prefer.¹⁹ Asking the following questions could be a good starting point: Will the information be considered credible? Is it available to practitioners on digital platforms? Are the channels chosen aligned with those preferred by HCPs? Is the practitioner involved in the process of creating the information?^{1,19}

3.3. MAKE HCPS PART OF THE CONTENT STRATEGY

Making HCPs part of the content strategy is a great way to increase HCP engagement, gain their trust, and improve the credibility of the content produced. On the Pharma side, HCPs could be involved in CME content creation – they could function as peer reviewers of CME content.²

Citrome suggests, “Pharma could ensure that the authors of Pharma-sponsored studies are people who understand the practitioners’ need of information and know how to present it in a way that will help the practitioner get the right information.”

Practitioners’ expertise could be harnessed by publishers too. Their expertise in the practical application of medical research, as well as first-hand knowledge of patient behavior and needs, could prove to be beneficial. Enlisting HCPs as peer reviewers of biomedical and healthcare-related submissions could be a great way to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the information being shared as well as to involve them in the content strategy.

3.4. THINK BEYOND THE CLINICAL TRIAL OR JOURNAL ARTICLE

Today, given the time constraints they operate under,¹¹⁻¹³ HCPs are accessing content in alternative formats and through platforms other than the scholarly journal. Moreover, the informationseeking behaviors of HCPs have been influenced by factors such as the burgeoning number of scholarly journal articles, which naturally forces readers to seek the most credible publications, and digitalization,

which has introduced multiple avenues for content dissemination and discovery.^{1,2,14}

Newman says that **Pharma companies and publishers “need to be able to share information in multiple ways. You have to go beyond just the clinical trials published in a journal.”** Some of the alternative content types that are being increasingly adopted by publishers to engage their target audiences include infographics, graphical abstracts, brief summaries, podcasts, and webinars, all of which could play a critical role in HCP engagement.² For example, the content solutions offered by Wiley include Video Abstracts (2-3 minute animations that highlight the key contributions of a study) and Video Bytes (1-minute animations that are geared towards explaining the key findings of a study to lay audiences).²⁰ Partnering with publishers for such opportunities could help Pharma generate content that appeals to practitioners, thus improving their relationship with them.

Samulack shares an interesting example of how publishers could adapt to HCPs’ information-access patterns to build a long-term and meaningful relationship with them. “The journal Neurology, the flagship publication of the American Academy of Neurology, is a weekly publication that enjoys a wide readership and disseminates content via print, online, and phone versions. In order to reach out to its practitioner readers, the journal introduced specialized Short-Form Articles—one-page print articles that provided the context for the research and included links to full versions available online. The journal found that the new format gained popularity because it made it easier for HCPs to absorb information. This is an indication of how publishers are responding to the time crunch element of how physicians are trying to digest and absorb the information that is coming at them in great amounts.”

3.5. INCREASE CONTENT DISCOVERABILITY BY SHARING CRITICAL DATA

Given the fact that Pharma is a key funder and stakeholder in research communication and consequent health outcomes, it is important for Pharma companies to recognize the importance of ensuring that research is discoverable. Here, both Pharma and publishers could adopt measures such as indexing and search engine optimization to help ensure their content is easily found by HCPs. Other ways of increasing discoverability include ensuring all trials are registered, making essential trial data easily available, and following some best practices in data management.²¹⁻²³ Elaborating how Pharma has already started taking steps in this direction, Citrome shares, “There are some initiatives by some Pharmaceutical companies to put their study data into anonymized databases. Practitioners can easily make a request to work on this data, and additional work can be done using the data that has already been gathered from clinical trials.”



4. How will the HCP-Pharma-publisher relationship evolve in the coming years?

In light of the challenges and expectations of practitioners as well as opportunities available to Pharma and publishers, it would be interesting to speculate how the HCP-Pharma-publisher ecosystem is likely to evolve. Newman believes that the HCP-Pharmapublisher relationship is complicated, but "it's a relationship that's getting better." Samulack says that this "ecosystem is evolving in complexity."

4.1. THE RISE OF ALTERNATIVE CONTENT FORMATS

Given the proliferation of different sources of information and the time constraints that HCPs face, alternative content formats such as podcasts, videos, or infographics will gain importance and popularity because they help "convey accurate scientific information in an easy-to-absorb way and are thus a great solution to increase HCP engagement."² Samulack envisions a future "beyond the research article because the journal article itself is evolving in many different ways and part of the evolution is towards media communication and different formats that offer greater sophistication for Pharma and publishers. The ecosystem is broadening in scope, delivery unit, and tools that are becoming available and are being adapted to present content. The consumption of information now is in so many different media formats that it is the publisher's responsibility to ensure the dissemination, discoverability, and curation of all of this content in a discoverable way, whether it be the manuscript, the podcast, or continuing medical education." **Going forward, Pharma will work with publishers to develop more and more dynamic pieces of information that help them increase HCP engagement and build their credibility as a source of reliable and relevant information.**

4.2. FROM CURATING TO BROADCASTING TO THE HCP AND BEYOND

Today's medical communications space is becoming increasingly complex, with the proliferation of tools and avenues for communication and outreach as well as the need to amplify critical findings and key messages to a larger community. Samulack feels that "the publisher is now becoming not only a curator but a broadcaster. An online journal is now only one facet of the dissemination of scholarly information. This dissemination and broadcasting of scholarly content is now manifesting itself in different ways, and serving different roles. We're moving toward a broadcast network of curated, high quality, vetted, peer-reviewed, and responsible content and it is the responsibility of both Pharma and publishers to ensure that all of the boxes are checked."

Donnelly predicts that, "The Pharma industry and the device industry are spending more and more every year on research and development. There is an increasing requirement of these industries to put all their results into the public domain and make them accessible and available for public scrutiny. I think there is going to be an increasing amount of industry-sponsored activity, which is going to come through publishers, to disseminate and communicate to HCPs, patients, payers, and regulators. There is a pretty wide constituency beyond purely healthcare professionals. I think the volume of that sort of material is going to increase over time."

4.3. INCREASED OPENNESS AND IMPROVED ACCESSIBILITY

The scholarly publishing industry is fast embracing openness and transparency with regard to the content it generates. With increasing global mandates to increase data availability, Pharma is slowly joining this space, too.²¹⁻²³ We can look forward to some interesting strides towards openness in the medical and healthcare information space, making it easier for practitioners to access critical data they need. Citrome is optimistic that "things will continue to improve with the increased role of transparency that is being mandated by regulatory agencies and governments." Collaborating with publishers will help Pharma improve accessibility to the content it generates.

4.4. QUICKER, EASIER, AND MORE USER-FRIENDLY SYSTEMS

Given the fact that the medical communications landscape is becoming increasingly complex, there is growing pressure on publishers and Pharma to streamline their systems and make things easier for HCPs and other users. Wyatt believes that "**everything is going to be faster; things will be quick. Systems will be very, very user friendly [not only] from the perspective of people working at the point of care but also for authors submitting manuscripts.**"

Donnelly supports this prediction saying, "Well, your average HCP wants simple updated information, relevant to their area of clinical practice. They want that information provided to them in an easy format because time is limited. They want to remain aware and updated. They may well have to evidence their learning and their skills because of revalidation and CME. So, I think HCPs will always be looking for access to quick, easy, short, simple education and tools that will enable them to maintain their clinical practice up-to-date and fulfill their regulatory requirements for renewing their license to practice."

In order to be able to effectively translate their knowledge into practice, HCPs require access to reliable content that is affordable, easily discoverable, and user-friendly. They heavily rely on Pharma and publishers to provide this content. As funders and generators of critical medical studies, Pharma can provide HCPs with accurate and credible information about latest advancements in their therapeutic area. Collaborating or partnering with publishers will not only help Pharma to provide HCPs with credible content required, but also create strong engagement strategies for building a more robust and long-term relationship with them. As facilitators, disseminators, and amplifiers of credible peer-reviewed content, publishers can ensure that the information that

HCPs receive is reliable, accessible, and easily discoverable. Pharma can also benefit from the range of content solutions publishers can provide, e.g., specialty publications or microsites. Further, publishers' relationships with societies can help Pharma reach out to and engage audiences from niche areas.

Knowing HCPs' information needs will help publishers and Pharma devise precise outreach and engagement strategies; identify opportunities for growth and business development; and significantly improve the relevance, discoverability, and accessibility of the medical data that is made available to HCPs.

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