

Medical representative visits – Information or Knowledge sharing

MR Should Act as a Catalyst for Sharing Knowledge, But Not a Salesperson

Doctors share very strong and unusual relationships with Medical Representatives. Medical Representative is essentially a catalyst who conveys knowledge on most recent trends in medical diagnostic and treatment to the doctors. However, medical representatives are being treated only as sales persons, but in reality they are channel for conveying information to medical fraternity.

While hiring MR is asked “What can they do to make the doctors meet them and convince doctors to buy from him”. But the question is why MR will have to chase the doctors. Sometime Doctors treat MR shoddily because doctors know that the representatives will not add to their knowledge but only push them to buy, *said by a Biologist applying for a Medical Representative Job.*

An industry professional running networking site for doctors in India said “I think they behave like a sales person only, probably because of their sales target. Otherwise they can be good resource to share information and market trend. When a person behaves like sales person his treatment is different from a doctor point of view. Moreover, most of the MR doesn't have required knowledge and are not well-trained”. Another professional in Pharma Industry said, “MR is acting as sales persons and even few of them working like postman. If MR needs to elevate respect in Doctors clinic they must be Basket of knowledge”.

Doctor in Tongia Heart & General Hospital who often interacts with MR said “most of the MR is just sales persons, only few maintain their subject knowledge deeply & share updates about the medicines. Because there is a lack of dedication towards profession”.

Hard to Identify and Manage Right Talent at Right Cost

Growing challenge in personal detailing is hiring right talent for detailing, training medical representative to communicate uniform brand message to doctors and continuously keep engaging doctors through the power of repeat detailing for higher brand recall. The growing number of alternative job options is adding to the challenge of hiring the right talent. Companies need to find talent whom they can train on both industry knowledge and soft skills. MR should be able to read the doctors mind, must be ready to learn new things anytime anywhere and should be smart.

Investigate Doctors Belief and Opinion on MR Visits and Personal Detailing

We conducted a study with doctors to solicit opinions and understand the perception of doctors about personal detailing tools.

The key observations in the study included:

- Regular visits of MR positively impact the prescription

- Personal detailing is most influential promotional tools but MR quality is dropping
- Brand recall is high, if MR regularly visits the clinic
- Number of visits / time of visits should be planned as per doctors preferences/schedules
- Quality of content and good communication skills crucial to engage doctors in MR Detailing

Personal detailing forms the backbone of the entire marketing activities. MR meets doctors, chemists and stockists to influence prescription pattern of doctors in favor of their brand.

- 43% of doctors believe that their prescription is influenced by regular visits of MR; while quality of detailing plays a key role in affecting prescription decision of doctors.

Most of the doctors agree that personal detailing is losing effectiveness, because of poor quality of MR. Doctors only find MR interesting, when there is a new drug launch. For established/regular drugs, MR lacks required creativity and knowledge to keep doctors engage.

- 57% doctors feel quality of briefing affects their prescription.

Despite the high importance of MR detailing among doctors in India, the quality of MR witnessed a big fall. Doctors agreed that MR executives are not well trained, lack required information on drugs and their communication skill is also poor. Even many MR have no science education background, at the same time they lack proper understanding on drugs. Doctors also agree to the point that if communication skill of MR improves, it will most likely to have positive impact on prescription.

- 85% doctors feel that, current quality and communication skill of personal detailer is poor.
- 57% of doctors say that if communication skill of MRs is improved then it may increase the prescription.

Doctors are willing to meet MR as they are primary source of information for them. However, most of them are really busy in treating patients and other work; making it difficult for them to always give adequate time to MR.

- 57% of respondents feel that if number and time of visits is planned as per their preferences, the prescription would increase.
- When we asked the ideal time for detailing, 57% of the doctors give 2-5 min for detailing, 28 % doctors give 5-7 min for detailing while 14% doctors give less than 2 min for detailing. If majority of doctors agree to spend just 2-5 min with MR, it means that MR should improve quality of detailing for better results.

Doctors are mostly busy in their clinic, they are also exposed to a number of brands; it is difficult for them to remember all brands if not briefed and reminded through regular visits and brand literature. The study included insights from doctors if MR should give detailing on any specific number of drugs at one visit to have better recall.

- 43% of doctors want 2-3 products to be detailed per visit while another 43% percent prefer 3-4 products per detailing, and remaining had not replied anything. Even doctors welcome sharing information about 3-4 drugs in a detailing, it suggests doctors consider personal detailing to be very important part of their practice.

Doctors also suggested that regular MR visits are useful for brand recall. Usually, MR hesitates to meet doctor after first or second visit because MR believes that doctor already know the required brand message communicated in the initial visit. However, it takes a little time for doctors to get familiar to brand and develop some sort of likeness for the brand. It might happen that doctors may not have an opportunity to use your product for days. Brand recall becomes very important for the companies. Hence, regular visits and repeating message can have favorable impact on prescription. It might take 7-10 repetitions of MR visits to change physician behavior. If MR wants to make every visit convincing and effective, then what would work is – profound knowledge in detailing, good rapport and superior soft skills.

While it would be really not possible for all Medical representative to challenge the MD with more depth of knowledge and science; but proper training and preparation will help communicate right and required information about drugs to doctors. Further, it would be more effective if MR can convince doctor through strong and persuasive communication skills. Unlike other promotional tools, sales representatives have option to discuss and prove their points such as why their drugs are more effective and what treatment conditions they fit, more specifically. The focus on improving the quality of meetings between MR and Doctors can be effective to improve the current image of MR from “unwanted sales visits to more knowledgeable/engaging session” thus promoting brand effectively.

The New pharma code has defined the more stringent regulation on promotional activities, so there are no more hooking gifts, outings and buying dinners etc. However, pushing the doctors to listen and buy is still part of the practice. Information travels too fast, and for the doctors it's comes free. With more and more information available online, Doctors wouldn't feel the extra pressure in gaining information. Hence, MR should focus on being a Basket of Knowledge to remain a constructive and helpful bridge between doctors and pharma firms.

