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What is the Benefit of Market Research for Physicians?

THE WAYS DOCTORS ARE MARKETED TO BUY PHARMACEUTICAL AND BIOTECH COMPANIES

Physicians are inundated with market research, but how does this benefit patients and what is it all trying to accomplish? You are listening to ReachMD XM160, the Channel for Medical Professionals. I am Bruce Japsen, the healthcare reporter with the Chicago Tribune and joining me today is Wesley Michael. Mr. Michael is executive vice president of Research Excellence at TNS Healthcare. TNS is based in Manhattan and is worldwide market research consulting firm for the pharmaceutical biotech and medical device industries and they also work with health focused ad agencies, media, and analyst. Mr. Michael is responsible for strategic market consulting qualitative and quantitative research design and analysis and account management. Before joining TNS Healthcare, he worked as a brand manager and held other senior marketing roles for McCormick and Company and General Mills. He has an MBA with concentrations in marketing, statistics, and econometrics from the University of Chicago and a Bachelor's degree in English from the University of Pennsylvania.

BRUCE JAPSEN:

Wesley Michael, welcome to ReachMD XM160, The Channel for Medical Professionals.

WESLEY MICHAEL:

Thanks Bruce.

BRUCE JAPSEN:

Well, TNS I had been familiar with for many years and following the healthcare industry, and I know that you guys do a lot of research, so if you could tell us in this sort of environment, where in my roll in a newspaper, TV, radio kind of guy for the tribune company, how difficult it is to convey messages to consumers. It really is changing on how is the best way for these companies to give their messages to doctors?

WESLEY MICHAEL:

Yeah. I mean it is a real challenge for our clients. Our clients are typically the pharmaceutical companies or the devices or diagnostic manufacturers, who have various ways to communicate. They do it with ads and certain publications, but they also have the benefit of

having sales forces they call individually all physicians, but even with all that the doctors are very busy. They may have a minute of time on the rate of they talk to somebody. You know how much time people spend with an ad if it's not something that they are really, really interested in, so what we do is a lot of work both qualitatively and quantitatively. To figure out how best to communicate a product's benefits or to capture physicians interested or to make them realize it could be of benefit to a certain patient type that he is treating. While that researches as you might expect is what we call qualitative, meaning we are sitting face to face with the physician or rarely on the phone and really having a discussion chatting with him or her showing some ideas seeing if it is communicating what they need to know about a product. Really working from what is best for them, I mean as marking of its fine is really delivering to the consumer in this case, the physician and the physician's patients, what they really need and what they really need to know without wasting the time about extraneous things. We also do quantitative work where we can expose physicians in more and more of our work is on the internet. Physicians love to do a survey on the internet, they may be doing it at home or they may be doing at odd hours in the office, but they can do this, answer questions, click on the responses and they tell us they really enjoy it too. They learn more about new products out there, though they may be messages blinded by the name, but they also learn about themselves, how they treat, what they are interested and just by virtue of our questions, you know, force them to think, oh how do I select a medication for a patient? What am I looking for? What is the qualities of the patient that makes me select A versus B or combination of A and B?

BRUCE JAPSEN:

So, what are these physicians telling you when they do these market research studies, if you could give us an example in any industry really because I think that really would be an effective way to reach a doctor if they can do a survey online in the privacy in their own home or on their Blackberry or whatever in the odd hours that they have free?

WESLEY MICHAEL:

They will tell us certainly a lot of different things. Some directly answering questions, some indirectly when we are showing him different things. But for example, we have a type of research we do or we also expose them to lots of different scenarios with different what we call message elements or different sentences or a chart or even a sound bite and no response to those. In terms of their interest, how likely they will prescribe or what kind of patient they would prescribe it for, and we learn very interesting things. We learn for example two things that are always most important to physicians about products or about the efficacy. How well does it work for a certain type of patient and the safety and those are often dimetrically opposed, something is very, very efficacious, the question might be how safe is it. Doctors are always concerned about balancing that. So, we will be learning about a product, what balance they are looking for in it, may be it is a condition for very severely affected patients, though they want safety, they are more willing to take more chances to get the patient well or there might be a more chronic disease. It is not life threatening that there is certainly safety is paramount. So, we will learn about that and even simple things, for example say how quickly a product works. I know that we have done research and we might have it worded a couple of the points, that works in 60 seconds versus works in one minute and you think well that thing is the same thing, but you will find it communicates differently. Sixty seconds may sound much faster than a minute, so you learn the big issues from them about what's important and also just how to communicate what words might work better in terms of communicating the facts about the product.

BRUCE JAPSEN:

Now when TNS does its work, they are usually doing the work on behalf of the drug and device industries. Do the doctors know you are there or are you sort of the people behind the curtain when you are doing the market research?

WESLEY MICHAEL:

We are upfront about that. The physicians know that we are working on behalf of those companies. Virtually, all the cases, it is winded

and this really be asking about the category and various products, but we will let them know certainly the standard in the industry if it's qualitative. Yes, there may be people watching this from our client from behind the mirrors. The last thing we want to do is anything, which is not above board, so people know that and realize that. Certainly, all the research we do is anonymous, in other words, we don't reveal the name of the respondent and the results were not published by any physician's name, it is aggregated and presented that way, so nobody is using it. It's important for us to draw a line between research and marketing. So many consumers know you get a phone call, somebody pretends to be a doing a survey, they are really trying to sell you something and it is a real problem in our industry. We try to take a very strong line. What we do is research, it is not trying to sell a product, it is about learning people's attitudes towards that are health communicative.

BRUCE JAPSEN:

How are things changing as far as what kind of market research you are doing? Is it more in the realm of patient safety, new product development, I mean clearly companies want to get their products in the hands of doctors and then patients, but are there anything specifically you are doing more of on the market research related to physicians now than you used to?

WESLEY MICHAEL:

There have been some trends. In the past, so much research was concentrated on new prospects that haven't launched yet, because in the pharma industry, you know, you have a limited pattern life and so much depends on getting out of the gate with the right message to the right doctors done in the right way and so lot of research was certainly focused around that. In the last few years, it's been more difficult for the industry, as there has been fewer new products launched, the FDA I think is taking a more critical line appropriately I guess in the light of results on some products and the companies are finding themselves focused on making more of the products they already have on the market, so we are finding more research done not just although new to the world product, but of a product that's out there and it's known by physicians, but finding out more about it and how better communicative or may be getting additional information on that product that might make physicians more interested in it, so that's definitely one area. Another one related to that, I think there is more interest in things related to but not directly related to the product itself, for example companies who are interested in how their sales force is operating. The detail reps at their common positions are interested in how they can be more successful in communicating with doctors. Managed care, you know, the insurance companies that we all know and love, when we pay co-pays to get our drugs, more and more companies are interested in that because it is so important than to who is choosing what drug, is it covered, is it a 20-dollar co-pay versus a 30-dollar co-pay, and so companies are concentrating on that, so we have seen the interest from our client spread out from just the brand new products and what attributes about they should be focusing on.

BRUCE JAPSEN:

Well, if you are just joining us or even if you are new to our channel, you are listening to ReachMD XM160, The Channel for Medical Professionals. I am Bruce Japsen with Chicago Tribune. I am your host and joining me today is Wesley Michael, he is an executive vice president of Research Excellence at TNS Healthcare, which is based in New York and we are talking about ways doctors are marketed to buy pharmaceutical and biotech companies.

We were just talking about how that's changed because healthcare keeps getting more complicated and I find it interesting too that like you say the health insurance industry is buying into your services because what is basic costs are going up and I think the companies and tell me from your perspective how this is working, it is becoming more difficult for them to market their products if co-pays and the doctor bills are going up, isn't that the case?

WESLEY MICHAEL:

If you are a pharmaceutical company and you have a drug that is say one of five in a category and they each may have their own specific benefits, but they may all be good products. One of your key concerns is the on formulary, is it the one that is covered by some of the big insurance companies because if it is not, the physician may say well, I will just write product A instead of product B because I don't want my patient to go to the pharmacy and find that he has to pay 100 dollars instead of a 20-dollar co-pay. So, it is very important to companies to market to the insurers to say here is why my product should be you want on formulary because they generally won't put them all and they will make selections and there will be negotiations between the pharmaceutical companies and insurance companies around that, but so much of it is around showing them why patients will benefit more from this and why physicians prefer their product to be on the formulary.

BRUCE JAPSEN:

Is there any advice you can give physicians, I mean on how to deal with, how they are marketed to, I mean is there anything that is coming down the pipes that they should be prepared for? I know that the former rep situation has changed a lot where the doctors all have certain hours they can go in and so forth and that was sort of a trend over the last 5 to 10 years, anything else that you are seeing out there that physicians and their patients can expect?

WESLEY MICHAEL:

One thing that physicians could do is get their voice heard, is participate in the market research. I mean, it sounds self serving. When we finish the survey with the physicians, firstly we were talking to them one-on-one, so often they will say "I am so glad that my opinion is being heard that it's been taken into account in terms of marketing, this is though marketed in a way that affects what I am looking for in a product and what my patients are looking for" and that's one way physicians in fact can though on what works best for them, just as in their selecting medications that they think are the best and in terms of them dealing with the sales reps that are coming in and giving them honest feedback about what they like and don't like, so that's one thing they could help them in terms of they are getting their voice heard among the pharmaceutical companies.

BRUCE JAPSEN:

Can you give us an example perhaps where there might have been a situation where physicians like or did not like something about may be how the industry changed?

WESLEY MICHAEL:

One of the things we hear, you know, you have done work with direct consumer advertising, we have always seen some physicians that are fine with that and they are happy that the consumers are well informed and come in and there are some physicians that find that may get in the way of them doing the job of patients, who are insisting on a drug even if not the right one for them. That scenario where we are often hearing that physicians are not happy with the way the industry has changed and where consumers are given that, you know, advertising directly to them.

BRUCE JAPSEN:

And I know that, that has definitely changed too because the part and parcel because of some of the safety issues Vioxx and so forth for

the industry is now delaying those ads for a few weeks or months before the doctors get them, but there clearly has been some changes in that arena that would probably help the doctors in being more educated about the drugs.

WESLEY MICHAEL:

To think about it is not quite safe for the patients be coming in with an ad from a product that the doctor has hardly even heard out, obviously the doctor needs to learn about it and consider it and get familiar with it and on the other hand, I think physicians for the most part have gotten used to the fact that direct consumer helpline is a help there and can be another source of information for patient because one of the things physicians wants the most is patients that take charge of their condition and will be compliant with the medication because they realize how important it is and that is one piece of it, is the consumers becoming more educated.

BRUCE JAPSEN:

Well, with that, I would like to thank Wesley Michael who has been our guest. He is an executive vice president with TNS Healthcare, a worldwide New York based market research and consulting firm. My name is Bruce Japsen, I am with the Chicago Tribune. I had been your host and you have been listening to ReachMD XM160, The Channel for Medical Professionals. Please visit our website at reachmd.com, which features our entire library through on-demand podcasts or call us toll free with your comments and suggestions at 888-639-6157, and I would like to thank you today for listening.

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