Pharmacists’ Perception of the Role of the Medical Science Liaison: A Cross-Sectional Survey

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The practice of pharmacy is dynamic and evolving with regard to expanded roles for pharmacists and yet pharmacists continue to be a relatively minor focus of the industry when compared to other healthcare professionals. In addition, their current sources of face-to-face drug information may not be perceived as scientifically balanced. Pharmacists are also important members of the healthcare team and there happens to be a strong correlation between MSL visitation frequency and self-reported influence on physicians with regards to choosing an appropriate pharmacotherapy regimen. With time, we only anticipate this influence to grow, which will presumably lead to greater informational needs. MSLs may be well-suited to address these needs and other, especially given pharmacists’ willingness to interact with them.

Limitations:
General limitations of survey data and correlative associations apply. Additionally, self-reported influence may or may not translate to actual influence over prescribers. This study is also limited in that a fair amount of respondents are in a non-clinical role and that a majority have not interacted with MSLs.

A 27-question voluntary, web-based (using Qualtrics®), and anonymous survey was e-mailed to 6,064 members of the American Pharmacists Association (APhA) as well as non-members in early January 2013. The survey was fielded for two weeks with weekly reminder e-mails. A 5-point Likert scale was used for value assessment. Statistical analyses and graphics were created using Microsoft Excel 2007.

Results (continued)

- A strong preference was seen for obtaining drug information from a medical professional (79%) vs. a sales professional (1%); 20% showed no preference
- 86% of respondents indicated they would likely initiate and/or modify drug therapy if a law permitted them. Reimbursement was the most common concern among those who were not likely to alter therapy
- Respondents showed interest in pharmaceutical industry-sponsored activities: advisory boards (59%), research (40%), and speaker engagements (59%)
- Most respondents (73%) showed an interest in attending more drug-related conferences, symposia, and/or seminars

Discussion

The practice of pharmacy is dynamic and evolving with regard to expanded roles for pharmacists and yet pharmacists continue to be a relatively minor focus of the industry when compared to other healthcare professionals. In addition, their current sources of face-to-face drug information may not be perceived as scientifically balanced. Pharmacists are also important members of the healthcare team and there happens to be a strong correlation between MSL visitation frequency and self-reported influence on physicians with regards to choosing an appropriate pharmacotherapy regimen. With time, we only anticipate this influence to grow, which will presumably lead to greater informational needs. MSLs may be well-suited to address these needs and other, especially given pharmacists’ willingness to interact with them.

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Conclusions

- Pharmacists show a moderate level of awareness of the role MSLs despite infrequent visits
- Pharmacists are influential members of the healthcare team
- Pharmacists prefer receiving medical information from MSLs over sales professionals
- Pharmacists are willing to interact with MSLs and which may suggest an opportunity to gather more data on this topic

References