Introspective Look at the Medical Information Processes within Partnership Companies

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Background
Partnerships for products are formed between pharmaceutical companies on the belief that this may lead to more efficient work processes and the minimization of business risks. The types of collaborations for pharmaceutical products can vary from a joint venture to a co-promotion, co-marketing, or co-licensing agreement. In a joint venture agreement, both partner companies contribute equities and assets to create a legal partnership to develop and market the collaborative product. In a co-promotion collaboration two companies manage the sales and marketing of their product; whereas in a co-marketing agreement, both companies collaborate to jointly market the product. Co-licensing agreements allow both companies to negotiate specific terms in the agreement ranging from full development rights for only one company to sharing development and marketing costs for both companies. These types of collaborations can vary from product to product within one individual company. Alignment of medical information (MI) across the different types of partnerships is an essential part of successful partnership work processes.

Methods
Twenty-nine partnership products from 22 different pharmaceutical companies were identified in the pharmaceutical market in 2005. Products were identified based on research of the pharmaceutical companies and the full prescribing information associated with their products. To identify the MI specialists responsible for these products, various individuals within the pharmaceutical industry were contacted via electronic mail (email) or telephone. An online survey was distributed by email to 34 out of a possible total of 58 MI specialists from pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies with partnership products. These MI specialists were also requested to forward the survey to their MI counterparts from their partner company in the 24 cases when contact information was not available. Recipients were asked to respond to the survey within 10 days. Two email reminders were sent during the 10 day period. Recipients were informed that participation would be kept in confidence, and no identifiers will be linked to the responses.

A 13 question survey assessed the various roles and responsibilities in MI departments across a partnership. These questions were formulated to assess:
1. Type of partnership: Joint Venture, Co-licensing, and Co-marketing
2. Medical reviewers of promotional material
3. Scheduling for collaborative meetings
4. MI representatives
5. MI activities
6. MI management
7. MI responsibilities
8. MI in the collaborative process
9. MI in the regulatory process
10. MI in the product development process
11. MI in the regulatory agencies
12. MI in the marketing process
13. MI in the sales process

Results

Verbal MI inquiries (during normal business hours):
- 24% stated that only one company is responsible
- 41% stated both companies share responsibility

Written MI inquiries (after normal business hours):
- 24% stated that only one company is responsible
- 41% stated both companies share responsibility

Other MI inquiries:
- 41% stated that both companies share responsibility

From the original 34 emails disseminated, 17 recipients responded.

Discussion
The results of this exploratory survey demonstrated that pharmaceutical companies form many different types of partnerships. Less than half (47%) of the partnerships reported were joint ventures. Approximately half (53%) of the recipients reported that they communicated at least 2-10 times a month with their MI counterpart. There were companies (12%) that did not communicate at all with each other and other companies (12%) that communicated at least 30 times a month. Across the partnerships, 35% of respondents felt that assigning the goals and objectives of both companies posed a challenge. Twenty-nine percent of respondents did not feel that the location of their partner company was a significant challenge in collaborating with their counterpart. Only 30% of respondents reported that both companies documented AE's. The majority of respondents (71%) reported that both companies collaborated in creating and/or updating standard written MI responses.

Limitations
One limitation of the survey is the small sample size. Only 34 survey recipients (59%) of the potential 58 MI specialists were contacted directly. Other recipients may have received the survey; however, this was not tracked in the survey.

In addition, comparing the responses from MI counterparts across partnerships was not possible because of confidentiality reasons.

Conclusions
Pharmaceutical companies form different and unique types of relationships and work processes with each other for partnership products. In addition, differences in MI processes existed among companies that formed similar types of partnerships (e.g., joint venture).

The results of this survey may allow for future studies to elucidate deeper work processes of how more specific functions within MI (e.g., creation of standard response letters) are handled by both MI specialists from partner companies.

References

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