Evaluation of the Evolution of the Pharmaceutical Industry Based Medical Information Dissemination to Healthcare Professionals

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Background

The landscape for Medical Information Specialists in the pharmaceutical industry is changing, and has developed from a combination of various components including literature database storage, degree of Medical Information expertise, and computer-based interfacing. This process began with computer-based technologies that explored local area networks and made real-time literature searching possible. Advances in information storage allowed for the evolution of the Medical Information Specialist. The role of a Medical Information Specialist was no longer seen as a distinct individual who handled unsolicited questions, but rather as a clinical professional with an advanced degree and strong clinical background. Furthermore, the advent of Medical Science Liaisons allowed for the opportunity to expand Medical Information externally, giving healthcare providers a personal encounter to discuss drug and product information. Today, electronic documents such as wikis, blogs, and podcasts are the latest of collaborative web-based tools that allow healthcare professionals to receive instant drug information updates. These tools foster collaborative practice sharing methods, by which Medical Information Specialists in the pharmaceutical industry can deliver product specific and disease state information. The current research aims to identify which of these web-based resources are being used, as well as determine when this new form of social media will be integrated into the role of Medical Information within pharmaceutical industry.[1,2]

Objective

The objective of this study is to evaluate the evolution of methods used to disseminate Medical Information to healthcare providers (HCPs) by the pharmaceutical industry.

Methodology

Twenty pharmaceutical, biotechnology, or bio-pharmaceutical companies were evaluated through responses submitted from Medical Information Specialists within respective organizations. Participants were asked to identify past, current, and future use of various methods of medical information dissemination including email, mail, phone, iPod applications, pod-casts, and real-time web access, among others. The data was also used to identify the period of time in which each company utilized such technology, or if plans to implement such applications have been determined.

The Rutgers Pharmaceutical Industry Fellowship alumni database provided contacts for Medical Information Specialists at pharmaceutical, biotechnology, and bio-pharmaceutical companies. Missing alumni data and additional Medical Information Specialists were also collected through an evaluation of online profiles in the LinkedIn professional networking site. To collect and evaluate such data a questionnaire was developed and distributed using SurveyMonkey™.com, a web-based survey tool.

Results

Figure 1: Method used most frequently to make HCPs aware of medical information services (n=11)
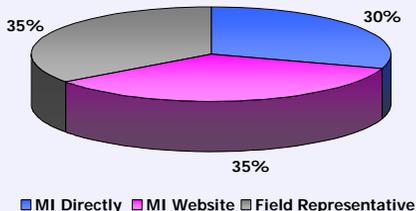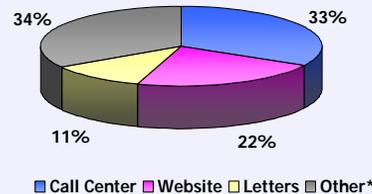

- MI Directly 30%
- MI Website 35%
- Field Representative 35%

Figure 2: Mediums currently used for medical information dissemination or those that will be implemented within one year (n=9)

- Call Center 33%
- Website 22%
- Letters 11%
- Other* 34%

*includes professional networking site (i.e. Sermo), real-time chat feature, mobile/smartphone/PDA application, RSS feed, or podcast/webinar

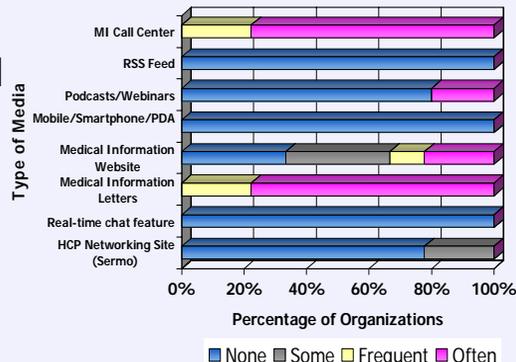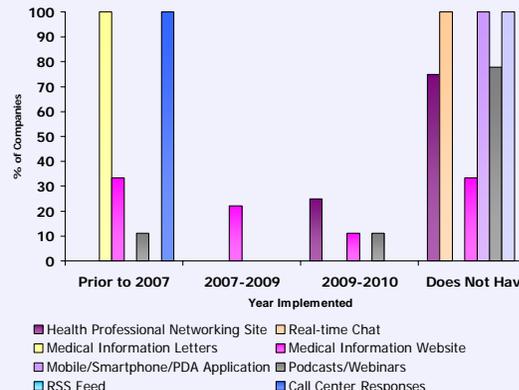**Figure 3: Medical organization's use of the following media features (n = 9)**

Type of Media: MI Call Center, RSS Feed, Podcasts/Webinars, Mobile/Smartphone/PDA, Medical Information Website, Medical Information Letters, Real-time chat feature, HCP Networking Site (Sermo)

Percentage of Organizations (0% – 100%)

Legend: None, Some, Frequent, Often

Figure 4: Time period for implementation of medical information dissemination methods (n=9)

% of Companies vs Year Implemented (Prior to 2007, 2007-2009, 2009-2010, Does Not Have)

Legend: Health Professional Networking Site, Real-time Chat, Medical Information Letters, Medical Information Website, Mobile/Smartphone/PDA Application, Podcasts/Webinars, RSS Feed, Call Center Responses

Discussion

- Of the 20 major pharmaceutical, biotechnology, or bio-pharmaceutical companies surveyed, 11 completed the survey (55%)
- Most respondents identified their company as pharmaceutical, having >10,000 employees worldwide, and employing less than 25 medical information specialists within the US (45.5% for all)
- All of Medical Information Specialists surveyed use Medical Information letters and verbal responses in a call center to answer medical information requests
- No respondents reported current use of podcasts/webinars, real-time chat features, or iPhone/smartphone applications to disseminate medical information
- For each of the following mediums, one Medical Information Specialist for each indicated plans to implement within one year (2010-2011): podcast/webinar, real-time chat feature, and iPhone/smartphone applications
- **Limitations:**
- Medical Information Specialists reported hesitation to disclose new use of technologies to disseminate information based on propriety agreements within respective companies. This also limited the number of respondents.
- Medical Information Specialists who completed the survey may not be aware of all initiatives planned by the company, as other strategists may be solely involved in the process until launch of technology
- The number of respondents accessing and completing the survey was limited. Only one medical information specialist from each company was invited to participate in survey, so as to avoid cross tabulation of company responses

Conclusions

A limited number of companies surveyed are currently employing the use of innovative technologies such as iPHONE applications, professional networking sites, webinars, and real-time chat features to disseminate Medical Information, based on independent observation of publically disclosed information as well as the results of this survey. Most Medical Information departments have not largely adopted point-of-care or interactive tools for distribution of information. One possible barrier to implementing these technologies may include FDA regulations. With expanded access and knowledge of such applications, Medical Information departments may establish the need for innovative Medication Information dissemination.

Acknowledgements / Disclosures / References

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2. Saxton B. Information tools: using blogs, RSS, and wikis as professional resources. Young Adult Lib Serv.2008;6(2)27-29.