

Strategies to Differentiate Your Product

By Dimitris Polygenis, Pharm D

In today's highly competitive environment, biopharma marketers aggressively seek strategies to differentiate their products from those of their competitors, thereby enhancing market penetration. In many cases, pharmaceutical technology is far ahead of the practice of medicine. Benchmarking can help marketers enhance the adoption of new drugs or devices, and drive product differentiation and market share.

In general, benchmarking refers to the systematic documentation of the usual existing practice. Depending on the context, benchmarking can have a number of meanings, for example, documenting the usual level of care in a given therapeutic area, the outcomes of a treatment, or even the value-for-money. By playing an active role in benchmarking, pharmaceutical marketers can promote accurate diagnoses and optimal therapy. Benchmarking provides an opportunity to promote a "better care" focus, rather than a "use-my-product" approach.



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post-myocardial infarction, and hypercholesterolemia. Consider the challenge of cholesterol management. What are patients' actual cholesterol levels? Are these levels optimal? If not, should more aggressive therapy be the goal? Can you position your product as the best remedy for this condition?

This "care gap" presents an opportunity to effectively market products. First, you must establish the gap's existence, then you provide a mechanism (your product) to close the gap.

Phase IV trials and registries offer an excellent method to benchmark, as well as to detect and establish gaps in care. The involvement of physicians in the benchmarking exercise may influence their practice. Once the problem is defined, solutions can be devised to change physician practice.

Changing treatment targets

The patient-first philosophy

The recent trend in post-marketing programs is to take the focus away from the drug and instead highlight optimal patient management. Unlike the simulated environments common to Phase III and IV trials and most Phase IV programs, benchmarking programs allow real-world experience with products using best practices.

Underdiagnosis and undertreatment occur in many therapeutic areas, including hypertension, diabetes,

When existing efficacy data do not adequately convey a product's value, there may be an opportunity for a benchmarking study to convince physicians that your product provides superior patient management. What do patients consider a desirable, suitable response? How do individuals measure efficacy? What measures patient satisfaction? In addressing these questions, you may want to consider an initiative that involves benchmarking patient-reported outcomes (PROs).

As an example, consider the therapeutic area of asthma. How should the "control" of asthma be defined? By systematically collecting PROs for asth-

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ma control in patients who are using your drug, you define whether they are meeting consensus targets for symptom control.

This data collection offers an opportunity to highlight the unique characteristics of your product. Does it offer better nighttime control? Is it easier to use? By establishing these benchmarks and sharing them with physicians, you create a level that the competition must strive to reach.

Documenting product value

In an era of low-cost alternatives, cost-effectiveness, and pharmacoeconomics, demonstrating a product's value-for-money is easier said than done. So how do new innovative technologies compete against low-cost alternatives? Simply put, they don't. Instead, new technologies should compete for premium dollars being spent in other areas.

Benchmarking can assist in documenting product value by identifying what society is willing to

pay for certain conveniences, quality-of-life benefits, and outcomes.

Funding treatments for hypercholesterolemia presents what cost to society? Can an argument be made to justify a premium treatment over a lower-cost alternative for diabetes or stroke prevention that has similar outcomes? Should the presence of a lower-cost alternative even matter if the cost-benefit is comparable?

Benchmarking is a theme entrenched in many new marketing strategies. The successful marketing of biopharmaceuticals is all about setting the bar, and then exceeding it. **CPM**

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For more information on the use of benchmarking, please contact Dimitris Polygenis at 1-800-811-9880, ext. 121, or at dpolygenis@phase4health.com.

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