

# MARKET INSIGHTS Beyond 2017

## Measuring MSL Value: Metrics that Matter



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**M**edical Science Liaisons (MSLs) have been around for about 50 years. Upjohn Pharmaceuticals first created this unique position in 1967, aimed at building relationships and research collaborations with Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs).<sup>1</sup> The role of the MSL has since evolved. It has become an increasingly important resource for pharmaceutical and biotech companies as regulations and compliance demands have increased, and the market has shifted towards more specialty products, payer-driven treatment decisions, and greater patient-centricity. This evolution has resulted in a broader scope to the MSL role, but the derived value of the role continues to come from the scientific and clinical expertise possessed by the MSLs, which leads them to build strong science-based relationships with both external (primarily KOL) and cross-functional internal stakeholders.

MSLs play an important role in providing information to KOLs to help

keep them abreast of advances in science. Furthermore, they also support KOL engagement in a company's medical affairs activities and bring insights into the company that can be used to refine medical and/or commercial plans. It remains to be seen how the MSL role will continue to evolve in Canada given Health Canada's recent initiative to publicly release previously unavailable clinical information concerning the safety and efficacy/effectiveness of drugs and medical devices included in drug submissions and medical device applications.<sup>2</sup> The release of this clinical and research information may offer the MSL an expanded opportunity to interact with KOLs through the discussion of additional scientific data.

Over the years, we have seen greater efforts to better describe and quantify the value of MSLs. It was over a decade ago that the industry experienced a shift towards using a combination of both quantitative and qualitative metrics when communicating

value to internal stakeholders.<sup>3</sup> Despite much attention being given to the matter, the heterogeneity in the MSL functions both across the industry and across a product's lifecycle, as well as the changing environment and regulations, has resulted in widely varying performance metrics for MSLs. A 2010 survey describing MSL perceptions of their performance metrics suggests MSLs do not agree that company-imposed metrics are a reflection of their true value to the organization; 50% of companies reported that their MSLs per-

ceive current MSL metrics as only "somewhat reflective" of their value.<sup>4</sup> Through speaking with Canadian Medical Affairs Leaders and CEOs, in addition to previous personal experience as a leader of MSL activities in Canada, it is evident that defining and measuring MSL value remains a challenge.

### What have we learned, and what metrics can be used?

A variety of quantitative, qualitative, and outcome performance measurements for evaluating MSL value have been

described in literature (see Table 1).<sup>3-8</sup>

### Should we utilize quantitative, qualitative, or both types of metrics?

Quantitative metrics have the benefit of being generally much easier and faster to obtain, and have been utilized as a performance indicator for some time. While "reach and frequency" metrics are generally well-accepted and utilized with field-sales activities, these activities are often tied to short-term outcomes such as revenue

**Table 1**  
**Quantitative, Qualitative, and Outcome Performance Metrics to Assess MSL Value**

Quantitative	Qualitative	Performance Outcomes (Combination of Quantitative/Qualitative)
Number of KOL interactions/day or month	Quality/depth of KOL interaction	Thought leader identification
KOL reach	Unsolicited/solicited KOL feedback	Competitive intelligence
Days in field	Internal cross-functional stakeholder feedback	Therapeutic landscape monitoring
Duration of KOL interaction	Internal management feedback	Clinical site investigator identification/evaluation
Number of maintained KOL relationships	Customers' agreement with disease or product messages	Generate awareness of company new to therapeutic area
Number of new KOL relationships	KOL insights gathered (disease, product, competitors, medical strategy)	Scientific representation at conferences
Number of internal scientific presentations by MSLs	KOL engagement in company programs	Assistance with clinical education, training and advisory boards/number of advisory boards conducted
Number of external scientific presentations by MSLs		Support of IIT* programs/number of IIT submitted
Number of scientific presentations by KOLs		Support patient registry
		Number of publications accepted

\*IIT: Investigator-initiated Trial

generation and market share change. Applicability of this metric to field-medical activities is less straightforward and potentially complicated by a focus on long-term outcomes, an MSL's geography, and individual performance objectives.

According to a 2010 US survey, reach and frequency measures can make up a significant percentage (41%) of how MSL programs across different companies assess effectiveness.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, forcing call quotas on MSLs may encourage more proactive promotional (versus reactive scientific) activities, but could also over-inflate the number of calls MSLs make that may potentially result in decreased quality of interaction.

Qualitative measures, such as those related to competitive intelligence, landscape monitoring, and product/disease insights collected during KOL interactions, can be quite valuable to an organization and its medical and commercial efforts. However, these measures are hard to gather, take more time, and may be judged to be insufficient from a business justification perspective. KOL engagement in company-wide activities, while an important measure, is limited in that it is influenced by a number of factors, many of which may not

be within an MSL's control. One of the best qualitative measures currently available is KOL feedback that captures what MSLs are currently doing or need to start doing to support physicians' efforts in improving patient care.

### So where do we go from here?

We are all well aware that "you get what you measure," yet how to properly define and measure MSL value remains open to debate as there is no industry standard. While no one has yet identified the perfect set of quantitative and qualitative measures to accurately measure the overall value of the MSL function, perhaps what is required to navigate in the dynamic and evolving Canadian pharma environment and sustain the MSL role is to:

- 1) Benchmark and publish industry-wide Canadian MSL activity, standards, and value
- 2) Publish a Canadian consensus of recommended quantitative, qualitative, and performance outcome metrics
- 3) Adopt a personalized company-specific approach when defining MSL value and applying metrics that will reflect the value of the company, the functional role the MSL team plays

within a company, and input from internal medical and cross-functional stakeholders, external stakeholders, and those individuals closest to these metrics, the MSLs.

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