

Influencing the Influencer

Establishing a relationship with the pharmacists

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Consumers routinely ask their pharmacists, “What medication do you recommend?” and “What do I need to know about my medication?”

Without the necessary up-to-date information provided by a rep or other viable source, the pharmacist can only reply with the best of his or her acquired knowledge.

The general trend in the traditional health-care industry is to detail a doctor, or advertise in journals or other media. Often, the pharmacist is an afterthought. By in large, sales force deployment consists of five to six physician calls and two pharmacist calls per day. Speciality sales forces have zero concentration on pharmacy. Pharmacists are often left to their own devices to find information, with the most embarrassing situation being a new product launch without timely notification.

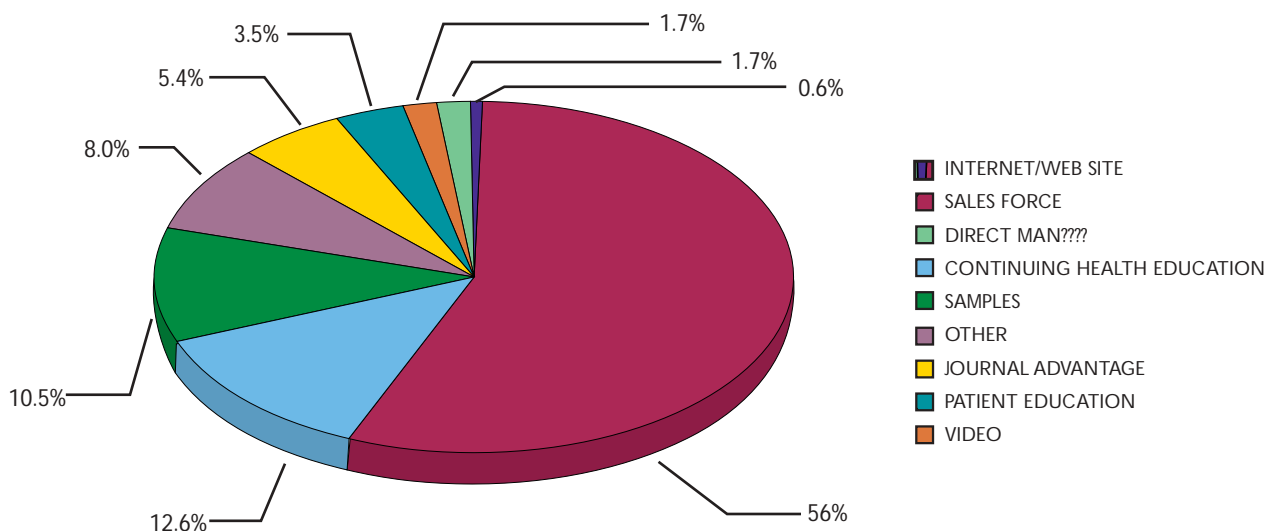
The following chart outlines dollar expenditures expressed as a percentage of overall marketing expenditures, and audience concentration.

In terms of salesforce expenditures, reps spend 5% of their time with pharmacists, whereas reps spend 95% of their time with physicians.

Not only is there a need for pharmacists to be involved in the communication loop, but needs of pharmacists vary from that of other pharmaceutical/over-the-counter promotional audiences. If we define an audience as all individuals who may influence, or be involved in a decision to medicate, including the patient, then it is important to understand and meet the needs of all audiences. Clearly, pharmacists are part of the intended audience, though often overlooked.

What do pharmacists want and need in the way of

2000 national Breakdown of Marketing Expenditures



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information, and what type of return is there in communicating to this audience?

- A relationship(WITH WHOM?)
- Other information – not just the monograph
- Details on drug storage and drug interactions
- Drug coverage information
- Information about the drug rep's area of expertise
- An understanding of how working with the patient can benefit all

According to Bev Herczegh, an industry consultant and practicing pharmacist with Pharma Plus, pharmacists would like to know how a product compares with others in the same category and what type of patient to recommend the medications for. Not only are pharmacists increasingly asked questions about drug selection, drug comparison, side effects and interactions by patients, but it is their duty to inform patients as legislated by the Ontario College of Pharmacists. A successful rep-pharmacist interaction is a relationship that facilitates and supports the duty of the pharmacist to their patient in the increasingly complex world of drug therapy. Most importantly, this interaction between the drug rep and the pharmacist needs to be conducted in a manner conveying the importance of the pharmacy and the challenges faced by pharmacists as part of the health-care team. Pharmacy is often misunderstood and undervalued.

On the other hand, the doctor needs a specific monograph and indication information, matching diagnosis with side effects, coverage, and scientific efficacy. One may see more of a "coaching role" with the pharmacist, and more of a "prescribing" role with the doctor. It is important to recognize that relationships are often built with the pharmacist, as they are easier to access than a doctor, especially those in various therapeutic specialities. According to the ACNielsen HealthVision report, patients/consumers often turn to their pharmacist or a family member for information.

The following questions were asked in the survey:

- In the past 12 months, which health care-professional(s) have you visited OR talked to about a health condition or ailment?
Family Doctor - 82.8%
Specialist Doctor - 35.2%
Pharmacist - 45.0%
- In the past 12 months, how often have you talked to

a pharmacist about medications or remedies? (Prescription, non-prescription, herbal, homeopathic)

Never - 36.4% Once - 19.9%
2-3 times - 31.2% 4-6 times - 7.7%
7-10 times - 2.5% More than 10 times - 2.3%

In total, 63.4% of respondents have talked to a pharmacist about medications or remedies.

Another area of tremendous opportunity in building relationships between industry and pharmacy is patient compliance or adherence programs.

"Partnering to deliver patient compliance programs is the single most significant area of missed opportunity between the pharmaceutical industry and the pharmacy profession," says Jane Farnham, President of Health In Motion. "Where else can you find a program that produces such positive outcomes for all involved? The patient wins big with improved health outcomes from taking their medication properly and for the appropriate duration of therapy. The pharmacist wins with a healthier, more satisfied patient and longer-term, trusting patient relationships. The manufacturer wins as patients continue their therapy for the prescribed duration of therapy. The physician wins with better outcomes for his or her patient and fewer problems to correct down the road and the payer wins as well, even though they frequently equate improved compliance with higher cost of therapy.

The costs of non-compliance to our health-care system are staggering! Who is better positioned than the pharmacists to exert a positive influence on what happens to that patient and that prescription once they leave the physician's office? With the average Canadian family filling 28 prescriptions per year, who has better access to that patient and information about their drug therapy? Investing in pharmacist centred compliance initiatives makes sense for the entire system."

So how does this benefit the pharmaceutical company? Very simply, if systems are set in place, and strategic campaigns with varying messages to each audience, there is a direct measurable correlation between a satisfied and loyal audience that would lead to enhanced respect, appropriate medication usage, and, ultimately, revenue. [CPM](#)