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How to get patient-centric

Is your brand patient-centered? Here are five critical success factors.

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by Med Ad News Staff

Put the patient at the center of every decision right from the beginning of commercialization. If it's good for the patient, it'll be good for business. Look through patients' eyes – not your own. Continually ask: What matters most to consumers? Consider cultural traditions, personal values, family situations and lifestyles. Look beyond specific health conditions.

Translate clinical benefits to real-world health gains. Think beyond chemical compounds to consider how consumer attitudes and usage will impact perceived results. Encourage shared provider-patient responsibility.

Drive a more collaborative relationship between doctor and patient vs. simply focusing on patient behaviors and outcomes. Develop physician education to deepen support to patients. Adherence is complex and requires multi-factorial assessments and interventions. Encourage healthcare providers to coordinate care while fully engaging consumers and their families.

Improve Patient and Caregiver Experience throughout the treatment pathway, along all touches. Consider product, people, process, interactions and communications. Ensure patients (and families) have education and support to make participatory decisions. Go to where your patients are; learn how they take your medication. Customize information, tools; encourage community, co-created information. Keep the 6 C's in mind: Consumer-focused; Conversation; Customization; Community Connectedness; Confidence Creation; Consistent Commitment.

Take nothing for granted. Even small details can be meaningful to patients and their families.

Almost every Pharma company likes to think of itself as "patient-centric", but patients, families, broader healthcare audiences, and governing agencies beg to differ. What would it take for stakeholders to grant pharma patient-centered status?

Prescription brands can become patient-centered only by putting consumers at the heart of their business model – through every stage of product development and deployment – and by focusing relentlessly on patient experience and outcomes. This means integrating tough consumer questions and learning into every phase of commercialization. Consumers increasingly demand direct communication. And they expect the kind of standards they're

accustomed to in other industries. It's a huge challenge, with substantial rewards awaiting those who find their way. Adopting the five critical success factors improves success. Marketers must put patients at the center of every decision right from the beginning; translate clinical benefits to real world health gains; drive a more collaborative relationship between doctor and patient; improve patient and caregiver experience throughout the treatment pathway; and take nothing for granted, understanding that even small details can be meaningful to patients and families.

A newcomer might wonder why pharma needs reminding to center on the patient; it's a stated part of virtually every company mission. Traditionally, patients were not viewed as the primary customer – physicians were – and in some ways, still are. New drugs were positioned to get maximum uptake and support of gatekeepers: healthcare professionals (who were thought to 'know their patients'). New products reaching their primary end points without safety issues were launched to physicians. While consumer companies can more easily design desired product features and benefits into the development process, drug discovery is fraught with special hurdles, plus limitations of what benefits new prescription or biologic entities deliver in clinical use. As a result, many compounds fail prior to FDA approval.

Historically, development and commercialization was largely led by physicians and clinical experts. Marketing's voice carried less weight, often came late, and largely focused on physicians. In addition, because Physician-focused sales people were often promoted into marketing functions, they brought little consumer expertise. Increasingly, hospitals and payers have become important customers. And with the exponential growth of generics and healthcare reform looming, business models are morphing to accommodate them faster than the shift to patients and caregivers.

U.S. health care is encountering the Information Age and Web 2.0: slowly and painfully shifting from a physician, sales-driven approach toward "patient centered" and market-driven. This reflects growing recognition that: incorporating individuals' perspective and greater involvement in health care results in better outcomes and satisfaction. Patients make the ultimate decision about whether they will live healthy, fill scripts and adhere to prescribed medications. Social media platforms connect consumers to each other, and encourage health information sharing. Companies and brands are publicly assessed. Dialogues include patient- caregiver experience, efficacy, cost, and side effects, and will likely include one or more conversations with their physician. Consumerism was, and in many ways still is, an unpleasant surprise for Pharma. Business and marketing practices, while improving, have not caught up. So the question remains, what would it take to get current and wisely prepare for Web 3.0? (Might it even be possible to leapfrog?)

To win at the five critical success factors, Marketers need to put the patient at the center of decisions at critical junctures along the clinical and commercialization pathway as early as Phase 1-2. Early and more integrated cross functional teams are more likely to succeed. Establish high standards right from the start, including a focus on translating clinical benefits to real-world health gains and staying true to the Six C's.

Preclinical & Phase I/II: What represents a meaningful difference to consumers vs. competitive products? Identify what is needed to differentiate beyond the chemical

compound; require a thorough competitive landscape and forecast. What is the opportunity? What do target consumers want? Need? This assumes deep, thorough customer understanding, and identifying the most pressing competition.

How will the new molecule perform against the 'ideal' product profile and label?

What studies and claims might convince customers? Demonstrate the product's best promise? Which scientific "advances" will be valued by patients and doctors in real-life?

What dosing and efficacy parameters might generate competitive advantage? Elicit consumer input early on to insure maximum learning prior to Phase III/IIIb pivotal trials. Identify efficacy and side effect trade-offs.

Are there ways to improve patient outcomes in real-life use? Think beyond chemical entities to what's required to maximize perceived outcomes. Consider product or form improvements, physician-patient collaboration, value-add products/services. Important ideas can be designed into Phase III/IIIb trials and forecasting.

Phase III/IIIb: Will Clinical trials optimize claims that matter to consumers?

Revisit anticipated claims and labeling to insure they will be perceptible and exceed competitive expectations. Me-too clinical claims won't do. What can the new product deliver? Some products can deliver meaningful benefits vs. competition, but differences can't be claimed if they weren't measured in pivotal studies. Capture differentiation for onset, duration, side effects, quality of life, ease of use. Would a comparative clinical study provide more compelling messaging and patient value? Do anticipated endpoints include a range of benefits across functional and emotional efficacy, QOL or managing potential side effects?

Meaningful claims and value-add for patients and families to improve product experience and usage. Consider potential unmet needs by priority consumer segments and ensure each are built into respective trials. Can product make comparative claims vs. the market leader? This can be especially important if launching a follow-on product prior to generic competition. Can study demonstrate what patients will lose by not following product use instructions? Can new product plus support program demonstrate improved efficacy, on-going usage, or ease?

Will anticipated endpoints provide a compelling brand positioning, including a powerful promise and 'reasons to believe' for high value target(s)? Can new product go beyond functional benefits to include emotional and higher order benefits? Claims that show improved quality of life or quantify how much more patients can accomplish each day? If new product offers a unique delivery system, is it included in pivotal studies to enable meaningful claims about benefits?

Is launch plan built around optimal patient experience to maximize trial, adherence and advocacy/WOM? Is launch plan in shape to provide consistent and supportive patient experience? Are strategies and tactics in place to efficiently capture attention and motivate

action? To help patients continue therapy? Are potential Consumer Opinion Leaders (COLs) identified with a plan to activate them?

Are empowering patient-centered communications and tools in place to build consumer trust, loyalty, and health outcomes? Are the 6C's well covered?

Phase IV Post Marketing: Once in market, are you set up to harvest and apply consumer feedback? Listening and learning real-time, either through social media or ethnographic research, can yield significant competitive advantage.

Assess early adopter and rejecter likes and dislikes shortly after launch. Is the product being used as expected and in ways that result in similar benefits to clinical results? Are patients thriving? If so, what can you do more of? If not, what should you change or stop doing? Are Consumer Opinion Leaders (COLs) supporting brand as hoped?

Improve doctor-patient relationships to drive better product utilization and patient outcomes. Listen to these conversations. Is the dialogue robust? Optimize target segment learning and claim differentiation. Are there opportunities for additional studies among high value segments to further differentiation and relevance?

Assess brand experience along each touch-point to identify what's working, what needs improvement, and what should be stopped. Are consumers enjoying a growing, deepening relationship? How easy is it for patients to ask questions? To engage conversations? To read and understand risk/benefit communications?

The stakes are high in the current environment. Those who master patient-centered marketing will likely move ahead.

"The purpose of business is to create and keep a customer" –Drucker

Editor's note: This is one of an occasional series of guest columns. Ellen Hoenig-Carlson is founder of AdvanceMarketWoRx (advancemarketworx.com), a consumer and healthcare brand consulting company.