

REIMAGINE MEDICAL AFFAIRS

Building successful medical affairs teams

A successful medical affairs team bridges clinical development and commercial functions to drive the uptake of innovative medicines. It includes clinicians who understand the clinical context, and the barriers and opportunities to getting innovative medicines to patients. It balances a team of experienced people with access to external competencies to ensure success and has the right leadership to enable the team to drive towards the required outcomes.

Medical affairs teams need to work across internal and external stakeholders, from clinical development and commercial to regulatory authorities and healthcare providers, at least 18 months before launch. This is a collaborative process, and there is a need to involve healthcare professionals to enrol patients and generate evidence and seek input from cross-functional teams to align on the narrative created from the evidence generated.

It is important to ensure local teams are acquainted with this narrative so that they can get their networks in place and prepare the market. The global medical narrative is based on the evidence generated from clinical development but must be subject to local interpretation considering country-specific regulations and guidelines. Local teams also need to feedback country-specific insights to global teams to shape ongoing data generation strategies.

Engaging with external stakeholders

Communication through multiple channels is critical and will be even more so in the future. It enables a continuous discussion with experts, which gives insight into potential opportunities for new innovations and how to respond to those opportunities.

Medical affairs teams need to be in the clinic and communicating at the right level of detail. For some teams this engagement is a new way of working.

Many external stakeholders will not go to pharmaceutical companies for their information. Medical affairs teams must, therefore, plan to put the information where stakeholders prefer to access information. For example, by making a medical information database searchable online. This is an important evolution to the approach previously used by medical affairs teams.

Building trusted relationships

In building trust with healthcare providers and the patients, medical affairs can become the partner of choice and the bridge between stakeholders. When the function brings an innovation to market, physicians trust that the evidence is appropriate to help them manage patients. Medical affairs teams can help physicians understand patient experience data, which is now critical to include, and enable patients to be an active participant in shared decision-making about their own care pathway, which they highly appreciate.

Building trust requires emotional intelligence and an understanding the context. It is based on clinical evidence and takes time to develop.

Conclusion

Medical affairs teams are key to the future development of the pharmaceutical industry. They play an important role in ensuring innovative products reach the right patients. The most successful teams operate effectively within their organisation and with a range of external stakeholders.