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Need for life sciences industry to communicate has never been greater

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The mystique of clinical trials can be overcome by the dissemination of medical and scientific information in an easy-to-understand language



A paper published in the journal Scientometrics in 1999 aptly states, “Science would not exist, if scientific results are not communicated. Communication is the driving force of science.” After the Second World War and specifically since 1952, scientific discovery has been accelerating; scientific literature in the field of life sciences has shown growth at an annual rate of 5.07%, with a doubling time of 14.0 years.

In this exceptional scenario, especially with respect to the surge observed in scientific publishing during the COVID-19 pandemic and the serious cases of misinformation like the hydroxychloroquine debacle, overinflated trust in the benefits of remdesivir, fake news, and other ridiculous conspiracies, communication is key in the life sciences industry. Such spread of misinformation mostly stems from a deep-rooted mistrust towards the life sciences industries, particularly towards biopharma.

The life sciences industry invests billions of dollars in a drug or a product before it even reaches the market. These drugs and products have a far-reaching impact on human health, and people attach huge expectations to them. Hence, communication is crucial to set the right expectations and establish trust with all the stakeholders and the public. If the industry wants to develop fruitful alliances with its stakeholders and audiences and wants to be seen as a credible healthcare partner, it is necessary to be aware, perceptive, and manage expectations via effective communication and clear messaging, both internally and externally.

A study by the Royal Society has shown that when people are scientifically informed, they are likely to make better decisions. Industry-wide efforts are being made to make scientific research more accessible and easier to understand.

An example of such an attempt is in the area of plain language summaries of clinical trial results for laypeople. Although there are some issues regarding the easy discoverability of these plain language summaries through search engines like Google, efforts are underway by several ‘big pharma’ companies (Pfizer, AbbVie, Johnson & Johnson, AstraZeneca, etc.) to produce such summaries.

Additionally, a recent study by The Center for Information and Study on Clinical Research Participation, a not-for-profit organization, showed that 85% of the patients who participated in a clinical trial believe that receiving a summary of the clinical research study is very important. These summaries are just one step towards demonstrating transparency and rebuilding trust.

The mystique of clinical trials can be overcome by the dissemination of medical and scientific information in an easy-to-understand language and prevention of the spread of misleading, confusing, and incorrect information.

Another scenario where direct communication helps to gain public and patient trust is when biopharma companies collaborate with patient advocacy groups and patient networks. It is a widely known fact in the industry that recruitment of patients in

clinical trials and their retention is a persistent problem. To this end, the life sciences industry can leverage its partnership with patient groups by seeking their collaboration in reaching and recruiting patients by spreading awareness about clinical trials.

Another interesting point of view can be found by looking at Wellcome, a global charitable foundation established in 1936. They focus on supporting science to solve urgent global health challenges. This includes tracking public views and opinions.

In a 2016 research study that was conducted to track public views on science and biomedical research, they site that the majority of the public was interested in receiving information directly from scientists about their research by talking to them or reading articles written by scientists in newspapers, etc. This is where digital tools and social media can be really useful for the life sciences industry.

Examples of such media are Twitter (tweetorials, Twitter journal clubs, etc.), YouTube (especially helpful initiatives undertaken by doctors during the COVID-19 pandemic), TikTok, and even Instagram. These channels help serve several purposes, such as educating people about medicine and science, protecting them from misinformation, serving as a quick and transparent medical awareness drive, as a forum for humanizing healthcare providers and the industry as a whole, sometimes for spreading awareness about and discussing results of clinical trials, and so on. Eighty years later, we are still failing to meet the true needs of the patient communication, as seen in the mistrust that bubbled up during COVID-19.

All this shows that there is a clear opportunity for the industry to improve communication and that direct communication will only help in gaining people's trust. The need for the life sciences industry to communicate in a meaningful, authentic, collaborative, and individualized way has never been greater. It is simple – the public is demanding information, and we ought to deliver it.

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