

A Survey of Medical Affairs Communication and Collaboration: Connecting Medical Science Liaisons with Medical Information

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Abstract

Medical Information (MI) professionals and Medical Science Liaisons (MSLs) fulfill distinct and separate roles that could potentially serve the company in a complementary manner. The purpose of this survey was to identify the current communication and collaboration between MI and MSLs in U.S. pharmaceutical companies. From the information gathered, gaps will be identified and utilized to create a proposal for optimization of future communication and collaboration. A 15-question web-based survey was distributed to MSLs through the Drug Information Association (DIA) MSL Community, internal company email, and personal and professional networks. Thirty-nine survey responses were received. For those not using a website for collaboration with MI, MSLs indicated that it would be extremely useful (34.6%) or useful (30.8%). In contrast, there was less support for an online discussion board, with 38.5% indicating it would be somewhat useful and only 17.9% rating it as extremely useful. When asked if they would like to receive updates from MI on hot topics, most MSLs thought these updates would be useful (53.8%) or extremely useful (35.9%) and would most like to receive them monthly (43.6%). This study revealed that MSLs value resources provided by MI, and would benefit from an enhanced connection with MI, especially related to more available resources and regular communication on hot topics.

Background

- Although Medical Information (MI) and Medical Science Liaisons (MSLs) have distinct roles and responsibilities within Medical Affairs, their functions may often overlap.²
- Based on published results of previous surveys, MSLs and MI identified job responsibilities that emphasize both similarities and differences in day-to-day roles.^{1,4}

Medical Affairs

Medical Information^{1,2}

- Communicate fair balanced scientific information
- Respond to unsolicited requests for information from health care providers (HCPs)
- Medical review/promotional review
- Access to database of all available information from a product clinical development program

Medical Science Liaisons²⁻⁴

- Communicate fair balanced scientific information
- Respond to unsolicited requests for information from HCPs
- Build key opinion leader relationships
- Assist with investigator-initiated research
- Face-to-face discussions with HCPs

- MI has the challenge of predicting hot topics and anticipating the need for response documents.¹
- MSLs may have more exposure to current HCP opinions, interests, and information gaps.²
- MI has access to documentation of information requests, and can trend regional, national, or global topics of interest over time, which may be useful to MSLs.²

Objective

The objective of this study was to identify the current communication and collaboration between MI and MSLs, reveal existing gaps in communication, and create a proposal for optimization of future interactions.

Methods

- 15-question web-based survey designed to evaluate objectives from the perspective of an MSL.
- Survey link disseminated through the DIA MSL Community, internal company email, and the authors' personal and professional networks.
- The survey remained open for 4 weeks, from November to December 2014.
- Demographic information including the size of the company and the primary type of product for that company was requested to ensure a broad response across different types of companies.
- The survey was designed to investigate the following information:
 - Current responsibilities of the MSL
 - Medium/frequency of communication with MI
 - Methods of collaboration between the MSL and MI
 - How well the current communication and collaboration met the needs of the MSL
 - Potential utility of additional resources or more frequent updates
 - Challenges in communicating and collaborating with MI

Results

- Thirty-nine survey responses were received from MSLs across companies of various size that primarily support brand (89.7%) or biologic (10.3%) products.

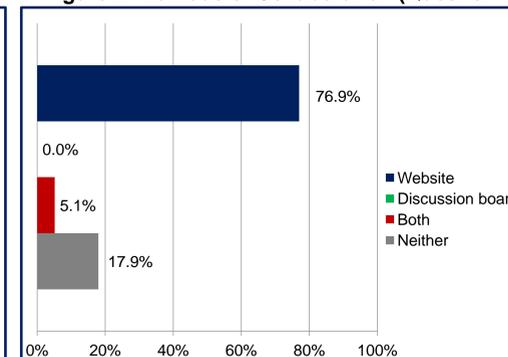
Communication

- MSLs indicated that they communicate with MI through email (97.4%) or phone calls (87.2%); only 33.3% currently use a website for communication.
- Most MSLs indicated that they communicate monthly (38.5%) during regular business, compared with weekly (38.5%) or bi-monthly (25.6%) leading up to a product launch.

Figure 1. Topics Discussed at Meetings (Question 6)



Figure 2. Methods of Collaboration (Question 7)



Collaboration

- Most respondents (76.9%) currently use a website with available resources such as response documents, slide sets, or publications.
 - When asked to rate the usefulness of the provided resources on that website, MSLs reported resources as often (37.5%) or very often (31.3%) useful.
 - MSLs find information they seek very often (43.8%) or sometimes (34.4%) available on that website.
 - In response to an MSL request, a new document or slide set may be posted to the website in 3 to 5 business days (21.9%) or more than 10 business days (21.9%).

Figure 3. Usefulness of Collaboration Website (Question 11)

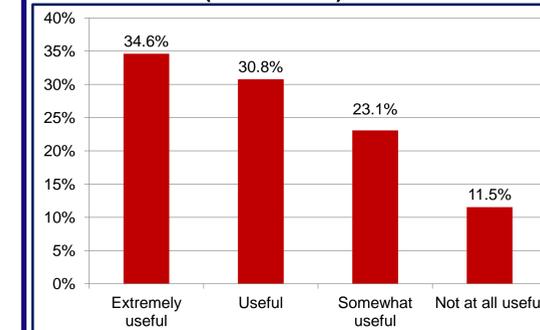


Figure 4. Usefulness of Online Discussion Board (Question 12)

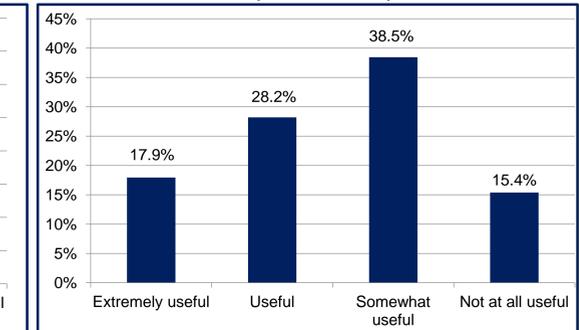
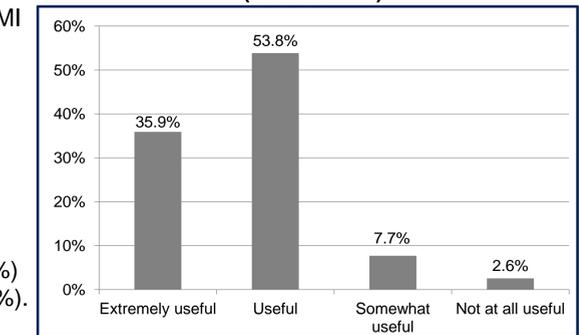


Figure 5. Usefulness of Updates on Hot Topics (Question 13)



Updates from MI

- Most MSLs wished to receive updates from MI on hot topics monthly (43.6%), followed by weekly (28.2%), or bi-monthly (20.5%).

Challenges

- The biggest challenges in collaboration between MSLs and MI were reported to be:
 - "Forum for regular meetings does not exist" (30.8%)
 - "Lack of time to regularly communicate" (20.5%)
 - "No functional medium to communicate" (17.9%).

Conclusions

- Few MSLs reported using a website for communication with MI; very few reported access to an online discussion board that links to MI.
- There was an overall positive response for resources provided by MI on a website; the value of the website to MSLs could increase by adding further resources.
- MSLs indicated that they would utilize a website designed to improve collaboration with MI; conversely, support for an online discussion board for collaboration was less enthusiastic.
- Based on results, MSLs should receive monthly communication or reports of hot topics from MI.
- MSLs value resources provided by MI, and would benefit from an enhanced connection with MI, especially related to more available resources and regular communication on hot topics.

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