



Making More of Field Medical

What is Field Medical?

Pharmaceutical Sales Representatives are having a tough time as their Healthcare Professional (HCP) customers are buckling under the strain of paperwork and patients.

A decade ago in the USA there was 1 Sales Rep for every 6 Doctors, now it is 1 to 10. Fewer reps chasing more doctors, trying to satisfy even greater patient demands, with more new products being launched at even higher prices.

Context

Pharmaceutical companies realised some time ago that sales reps could only ever be part of the marketing mix thus creating the Field Medical role, in the 1990's. Medical Affairs and Medical / Scientific Advisors had existed for years, but these were primarily office based roles, advising internally. Informing and educating HCPs on an expert, peer to peer basis was very much a secondary role.

Field Medical reversed these priorities putting scientific and clinical experts out into the regions. They were often therapy aligned to proactively build relationships with key opinion leaders through information, education and debate. They were, most importantly, freed from any commercial or sales objectives.

Field Medical has had three decades to develop and evolve and yet for some, the role is still poorly understood. Those responsible for the performance and development of Field Medical may understand the technical and clinical knowledge they require and be less clear on the communication and interpersonal skills necessary.

This whitepaper is designed for Leaders, Managers, Medical Affairs and Field Medical teams who want to make the most of their valuable resource. It outlines the essential capabilities they require, with a particular emphasis on their communication, influencing and interpersonal skills. Without exemplary skills even their prodigious levels of knowledge will struggle to effectively inform and educate healthcare professionals. And this could mean that ultimately your patients may not get the very best treatment available.

Inevitably this paper describes typical people in archetypal roles so if your situation is uniquely different do get in touch and we can customise a plan just for you.



The Field Medical Role

Medical Affairs and Field Medical are often some of the most highly qualified and experienced of professionals in any commercial healthcare company. Often recruited for their scientific, clinical and therapeutic excellence, they are then thrust into a commercial and customer-facing world that many of them have not been trained for.

Whilst sales reps typically sit squarely in the commercial sector with activity and sales targets, marketing messages and sales-aids, Field Medical does not. Their role is clearly and robustly delineated with no commercial focus, no sales measures and no marketing messages. Just expert information and impartial advice with more freedom to discuss both on and off label use of medicines.

**In the words of Sir Andrew Witty
(ex-CEO GlaxoSmithKline, CEO Optum)**

“We recognize that we have an important role to play in providing Doctors with information about our medicines, but this must be done clearly, transparently and without any perception of conflict of interest.”

4 Step Performance Audit

Having a clear and well informed understanding of the current performance of Field Medical individuals and teams is a valuable start. A performance audit however, requires more information than just “How Well Are We Doing?”

Furthermore, an audit that focuses solely on weaknesses and faults is rarely motivational.

An informed and motivational performance audit should include the following four steps:



Define Performance Standards

A performance audit starts with a clear and agreed understanding of what an ideal performance looks like. This can be as simple as a job description or as comprehensive as a competency framework. Either way it needs to set out, with objective clarity, the behaviours expected from an ideal Field Medical person. It needs to address the KSA of effectiveness: Knowledge, Skills and Attitude.

Assess Current State

Once the ideal desired state is defined, individuals and teams can be assessed against the three criteria of Knowledge, Skills and Attitude. This process can be a self-assessment, manager assessment or ideally a 360-assessment with observation and input from peers, managers and even customers. Objective behavioural criteria make it easier to agree objective behavioural assessments.

Evaluate Performance Gap

This is the gap between the ideal and reality, informing both personal development plans as well as being rolled up into Team or Company analyses.

Plan Actions And Resources

Training plans seek to move individuals closer to the ideal, by reducing the performance gap, and can include any of the following:

- Knowledge gaps can be filled by a range of data sources including journals and books, conferences and lectures or on-line, e-learning
- Skills gaps are best developed through face-to-face practical training which gives participants the opportunity to try new approaches, receive feedback and practice with peers, managers or specialist training consultants
- Attitude gaps can be far more challenging to address as there will be underlying issues at deeper levels such as beliefs, values or motivation and which require skilled coaching from a manager or professional performance coach

7 Field Medical Qualities

Every organisation defines their specific performance standards uniquely, reflecting their language and culture, therapeutic and business priorities. However, there are seven critical qualities every Field Medical and Medical Affairs professional needs if they are to be fully effective.

The Knowledge Curriculum

There are broadly three fields of knowledge that Field Medical must have complete mastery over if they are to engage in productive and mutually valuable peer to peer conversations with senior HCPs:

1. **Customer knowledge:** an understanding of the healthcare system within which they work; the prescribers, dispensers, payers and influencers plus the practical, clinical and political relationships between them all.
2. **Therapeutic knowledge:** an in depth knowledge of the relevant disease fields in which their brands are licenced as well as a broad understanding of their customers' wider area of interest and expertise including disease pathology, causation, diagnosis and treatment pathways.
3. **Brand knowledge:** an exemplary and well informed understanding of one's own and competitor medicines and treatments, their licensed indications and off licence experience, modes of action, pharmacology and pharmacokinetics.

Knowledge is analogous to the books in a library. If Field Medical are to be seen as a valuable reference source for clinical thought leaders, their personal knowledge library must be fully stocked with all the classical, as well as the very latest publications. If the selection of reference material is too narrow or too out of date then HCPs will go elsewhere for their insights.



The Skills Curriculum

There are four skill sets that Field Medical must again develop in order to educate, inform and influence the treatment of any given disease area. If knowledge equates to the books in a reference library, then interpersonal communication skills represent access to that library. There is little point in a great collection if the doors are locked and lights are out.

1. One-To-One Communication Skills:

- a. The ability to create rapport and relationships either face-to-face, by email, phone or online
- b. The insight to pitch a conversation at the right level for the experience, role and seniority of the customer
- c. The questioning and listening skills required to truly understand the customer's view of their world
- d. The diplomacy needed to challenge different and maybe less well informed or out of date clinical thinking – and to handle challenges to one's own data
- e. To manage the agenda so that they become a resource to the physician whilst also recognising the purpose they have to maximise the value their brands bring to patients

2. Presentation Excellence:

As therapeutic experts, Field Medical are frequently called upon to present clinical data to customers and internal colleagues alike, requiring them to:

- a. Engage an audience rather than just recite at them
- b. Underpin the quality of the data by presenting it with confidence and fluency
- c. Understand the dynamics and interactions required with PowerPoint if it is to add value rather than distract and detract from the presentation
- d. Manage audience interaction, questions and challenges with ease

3. Meeting Facilitation Skills:

Ranging from internal meetings to customer facing advisory boards, Field Medical not only need to present data but also facilitate conversation, discussion and debate amongst colleagues and customers.

- a. Building a cohesive and productive atmosphere, building trust and openness
- b. Encouraging communication involving everyone, but not dominated by anyone
- c. Seeking consensus on which everyone can agree
- d. Creating an action plan with genuine commitment from participants
- e. As well as handling any conflict, should it occur

4. Peer Leadership:

Medical Affairs have a pivotal role at the heart of their company, bridging between their senior, influential customers and the company's sales, marketing, medical and clinical functions. Without direct reporting lines or formal authority over their colleagues, they nevertheless have seniority and experience which gives them informal influence which they have to know how to use.

- a. How to influence without authority
- b. Motivating others to support projects and initiatives
- c. Managing complex projects and the internal and customer stakeholders
- d. Balancing priorities and managing limited time effectively and efficiently

In Conclusion

Field Medical is a valuable peer-to-peer role, informing and educating companies and HCPs as a therapy aligned, regional outreach of the Medical Affairs function. Whilst they are often recruited for their exceptional scientific and clinical knowledge, they typically need to broaden their experience of any given therapeutic field and deepen their understanding of particular brands and treatments.

In addition they require a wealth of specialist communication skills so that they can leverage their knowledge for the benefits of customers and patients, via influential one to one conversations, group presentations and facilitation of meetings. Plus the ability to “Lead Without Authority” ensures that their central role amongst cross-functional company peers synergizes everyone’s efforts for the benefit of patients, healthcare professionals and shareholders.

Excel Communications is a global training consultancy specialising in the development of communication skills in the pharmaceutical industry amongst Medical Affairs and Field Medical. We will custom design, deliver and evaluate performance development for you and your team, because we talk your language, so you can Learn – Grow – Succeed.



LEARN · GROW · SUCCEED

Excel Communications has been providing global tailored leadership, management and communication skills training since 1985. Our core purpose is to develop individuals to succeed in business. We're friendly, engaging, personable and honest with a passion for interactive training and customer service excellence.

Empowering people to learn, grow and succeed is at the heart of all we do.

Excel Communications

45 West Street
Marlow
Buckinghamshire
SL7 2LS

+44 (0) 1628 448 854

Hello@excel-communications.com
www.excel-communications.com

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