

Partnering with Physician Groups to Develop Outcomes Studies

Enhance relationships and boost product sales

By Craig S. and Carol J. Stern

Is it possible for your company to create strong relationships with provider groups that are not based on a particular drug or on low cost? After all, the relationship usually cannot be sustained simply by providing a low-cost drug. And your company will want the relationship to last beyond the life cycle of just one product.

One way to address this problem is to create a value proposition for drugs based on improving health outcomes. One way to create that value proposition is to team up with your customers to develop meaningful outcomes studies.

"Health outcomes" are indicators of the effectiveness of healthcare measures on patients. They are more than package insert indications. Health outcomes are the result of a process of prevention, detection, and/or treatment. Examples of outcomes measures are morbidity, functional status, serum cholesterol, pain level, and the like.

"Outcomes studies" systematically quantify outcomes indicators (e.g., morbidity, infection rates, emergency room visits, etc.) to analyze the outcomes of medical or surgical interventions, or noninterventions. Outcomes studies can also be used to determine the "value proposition" for differentiating one method of treatment from another.

Properly implemented studies may expand the market for all agents in given therapeutic categories by identifying patients that are not currently being treated but are at risk for certain medical consequences. Early treatment and ongoing management of disease (for example, cardiovascular disease) can, in turn, help prevent the utilization of expensive interventions (surgery) at a later time.

Reliable outcomes data can also be

used to provide documentation that can help to increase market share.

Process overview

The optimal sequence of events in the development and utilization of an outcome study is as follows:

- Perform the outcome study, using dependable parameters and controls.
- Identify areas for process/quality improvement through patient profiles.
- Implement provider education based on the areas requiring improvement.
- Ensure continuity in improved quality of care through follow-up on performance.

Upon completion, some outcomes studies may be appropriate for publication in peer-reviewed journals. This gives them wider exposure and enhances their credibility.

How to get started

Here are four basic steps that will help your company initiate a study.

1. Identify the disease. The company (or a physician group) must first identify a disease or syndrome that requires study and must determine the value proposition for physicians and their patients. (For example, early pharmaceutical intervention for enlarged prostate can help postpone or prevent subsequent surgery.)

2. Identify resources. Those who are directing the study must identify appropriate resources to develop parameters and manage the study—that is, they must put together an internal outcomes research group or an independent third party. A third party is frequently of interest to physician groups because its presence will cause

the results to be considered less biased.

The study must be based on an accepted standard that is evidence-based and quality-driven. Pragmatically, the choice of indicators should be driven by what is acceptable to the medical group, simple to measure, and actionable. The analyses will require an integration of all applicable electronic data sources (medical encounters, pharmacy claims, and laboratory data).

Keep in mind that data is never perfect. In our experience, pharmacy data is the most complete, while medical data is frequently less reliable; laboratory data may have to be purchased from dependable outside sources.

3. Stress quality and action. It is important to emphasize that the outcomes studies performed for physician groups are dedicated to identifying quality issues and actionable results (for example, "What quality issues need to be addressed by the practice?" and "What steps can we take to improve the situation?").

4. Support the program with education and training. An education/training program must support the outcomes study, and there must be a follow-up on performance to measure future data to ensure "lessons learned."

Role of representatives

Here are some suggestions on what you can do to implement outcomes studies with physician groups in your territory:

- Find out if your company has a department (for example, pharmacoeconomics) that helps develop and manage studies with customers.
- Ask your manager what are the appropriate protocols for contacting a physician group that may be interested in participating in studies,

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- Keep your manager advised of every contact you have with the physician group and/or its Medical Director.
- Make no promises that you cannot keep. Remember that it is always better to undercommit and over-deliver than the other way around.
- Use your contacts with the physician group to build relationships, not to seek detail time. That opportunity will come later. The two activities—sales and research—must remain separate.
- Enjoy as much of the process as you can. It will take you beyond your normal responsibilities and can be a pleasant way to learn about disease states and interact with many different people.

Credible outcomes studies are a "win-win" proposition. By applying the scientific method to the evidence-based care of patients, physicians receive information that should help them to improve patient care, and the pharmaceutical company involved provides a true value-added service. The sales representative forms a strong relationship with the physician group, or gain entry into a hard-to-contact group, and verifies the value of a drug in the target population. Frequently, the market for

the medication expands because untreated patients are identified. Finally, the sales representative positions the sales argument around the efficacy of the drugs rather than the price. ✨



What you can do: Check with your manager to determine if it is appropriate for you to partner with customers in the

development of outcomes studies. Dependable study data can go a long way in helping make a physician's job easier.

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Bottom Line

Opportunities through outcomes

Partnering with outcomes to develop outcomes studies is an effective way to add value to your company's sales and marketing efforts.

When done properly—and when the integrity of the data is solid—outcomes studies can help physician groups enhance quality of care and improve cost-effectiveness.

If you decide to get involved with an outcomes study with physician groups, be sure to follow carefully protocol.