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HOW TO GIVE HCPS THE SUPPORT THEY NEED IN THE ON-DEMAND ERA

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We all know the COVID-19 pandemic placed a heavy burden on healthcare professionals (HCPs). Medics across the globe are exhausted, overworked, and under-resourced. In the UK specifically, [over half of GPs](#) are struggling with their workload, and many are considering leaving the profession altogether.

But there's one particular factor that's widely overlooked, and it's a new type of pressure stemming directly from patients in the post-pandemic, on-demand society. This is an area where pharma brands can (and in my opinion should) give HCPs their full support.

Post-pandemic, patients want medication on their own terms—just as they do with on-demand media content, takeaway food, or rideshares. COVID-19 accelerated an already existing trend for people to take a more active role in their own healthcare. And they're generally more considered about any treatment they receive.

Of course, people taking a greater interest in their own health is an incredibly positive trend. However, it does put the onus on HCPs to gain a far deeper and wider understanding of the pharmaceutical options available.

Pharma companies can help to relieve this pressure a little by assessing how they communicate with HCPs. By refining their marketing and messaging activities, they can give HCPs the personalised support they need to interact with these newly engaged patients.

It's worth noting that most HCPs aren't entirely enamoured with pharma marketing. According to a global [Accenture report](#), almost two-thirds feel the volume of digital pharma communications is too great, and that pharma companies have “spammed” them during the pandemic.

Equally, the majority of pharma companies accept that marketing, and general communication with HCPs, is an area in which they don't excel. The grounding of field-sales teams during various lockdowns highlighted just how inadequate pharma websites and portals were, and how unprepared the entire industry was for rapid digitalisation.

With that in mind, let's take a closer look at how the on-demand era is impacting HCPs. Then we'll explore the steps pharma companies can take to offer a more helpful, personalised approach and make HCPs' lives a little easier.

THE CONSUMER IN CONTROL

Prior to the pandemic, people were already taking more interest in healthcare and were questioning medication or treatment, rather than simply taking whatever their doctor prescribed. But COVID-19 has pushed this trend forward in three key ways.

PROACTIVE MONITORING AND PREVENTION

The message that prevention is better than cure finally seems to be sinking in, and people are taking steps to avoid ill health. This is perhaps due to an increased focus on wellbeing during lockdown, or higher awareness of the underlying conditions that make us medically vulnerable. Whatever the reason, there's a growing trend for people to be more physically active and to monitor their health so they can react to any changes.

This trend is illustrated by soaring adoption of wearable tech, with the [fitness tracker market](#) across Europe expected to grow more than 20% each year until 2027. In addition, we're seeing increased use of proactive testing where patients supply samples, get an analysis, and receive detailed actions to prevent health issues, all from the comfort of their own homes.

This shift toward preventing ill health is great news for HCPs in the long term. A [McKinsey Global Institute](#) report indicates the health burden on European countries could be reduced 30% over the next two decades by applying proactive interventions. But patients identifying and looking for ways to address their own health issues is sure to add to the strain HCPs are already under in the short term.



SELF-CARE OVER THE COUNTER

Another trend in today's on-demand society is a willingness to self-care when people do get ill. An inability to book appointments or a desire to avoid picking up a virus in the doctor's waiting room has driven an increase in patients researching pharmaceutical products and buying them over the counter (OTC) to try out.

A [survey](#) of UK consumers reveals almost 70% of people are more likely to consider self-care as their first option than they were before the pandemic. But the trend for self-care expands far beyond the UK, with the [European OTC drug market](#) expected to grow from \$33 billion in 2020 to \$46 billion by 2026.

Self-care with OTC medications gives patients quicker access to potential treatments without waiting for an appointment or queuing at a surgery. While in theory it takes some pressure off HCPs, it also means the patients they do interact with are likely to have already tried (or may still be using) a variety of medications. With better-informed patients who are already testing out OTC remedies, HCPs need a deeper understanding of the pharmaceutical landscape to make the right recommendations.

DEMAND FOR BESPOKE TREATMENTS

On the subject of better-informed patients, the third trend contributing to pressure on HCPs is people's demand for bespoke treatments that suit their lifestyle or beliefs. Rather than blindly accepting whatever their HCP suggests, patients now want to go under the bonnet of the medicines available to discover how they are made and what they contain.

Some patients, for example, want to know whether pharmaceuticals are eco-friendly and whether they are ethically and sustainably tested and produced. Many are looking for "free-from" treatments that don't contain animal products, certain chemicals, alcohol, or sugar.

With rapid advances in technology, this trend for bespoke treatments is moving in the direction of precision medication. This enables drugs to be made specifically for a patient according to a number of variables including blood test results and lifestyle factors.

Once again, the move away from a one-size-fits-all approach is a positive trend. But it does put extra pressure on HCPs tasked with recommending and prescribing medications.

THREE STEPS TO SUPPORT HCPS

Pretty much every pharma company knows it needs to do a better job of talking to HCPs and supporting them with useful interactions via the right channels and at the right frequency.

There's a good chance you're already listening to your HCP customers and exploring solutions that will enable you to do just that. But before you invest in the latest tech, it's vital to consider what you're actually trying to achieve.

The following three steps will set you on the right track to deliver more helpful and personalised experiences to support HCPs in the on-demand era.



STEP ONE: BREAK THE SILOS AND BRING DATA TOGETHER

The first step is to unify your first-party data. It's likely you already have a lot of information about the HCPs you work with, but it is equally likely to be stored in multiple places, and siloed by brand, campaign, or market.

The simplest place to start is often your website or portal, where HCPs register and log in to find information about particular drugs or treatments. By linking this with a customer data platform (CDP), you can start to build data portraits of HCPs to understand what they are looking at, what they are interested in, and what additional training or information they might need.

You can then expand your knowledge by adding data from other touchpoints such as engagements from the field-sales team or interactions at conferences. You can also explore how HCPs react to email messaging. What emails have they been sent? What have they opened? What have they responded to? You can even enrich your first-party information with high quality third-party data sets.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

ACXIOM HELPS PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES HARNESS THE POWER OF DATA TO STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS WITH HCPs AND BUILD TRUST. IT ENABLES THEM TO ENGAGE HCPs IN AN EFFECTIVE, EMPATHETIC, OMNICHANNEL WAY.

[SHOW ME HOW](#)

STEP TWO: RECOGNISE HCPS TO DELIVER ON THEIR NEEDS

Bringing your first-party data together to build data portraits is a great first step. But to really understand HCPs you need to recognise who they are at every touchpoint, which requires identity resolution. From basic data hygiene to validate HCP contact details to full identity resolution solutions that allow you to link known and anonymous data across channels in a single customer view, identity solutions allow you to understand what HCPs are interested in and deliver relevant experiences.

It's fairly simple to know who you're talking to when HCPs are logged into your portal. It's also possible to then link these interactions with other touchpoints. Anywhere an HCP leaves an indicator—whether that's using a mobile device at an industry event or browsing medical media online—that interaction can be added to a data portrait. These portraits may be anonymous for a period, but at some point they can usually be linked back to known information about that HCP.

When you recognise HCPs and gain a holistic view of their interactions, you can really understand what they mean to you as a business and what the right next step is for them. Consequently, you can deliver consistent, relevant messaging that gives HCPs all the support they need.

STEP THREE: GET THE RIGHT MIX OF CHANNELS FOR YOUR HCPS

Once you have unified data and an understanding of who your HCP customers are (as well as what they need) across multiple touchpoints, it's time to understand their preferred channels so you can deliver the best possible experiences.

The COVID-19 pandemic inevitably meant a shift to digital channels, but most pharma companies aren't using these to full effect. Email, for instance, is a great channel for quick communication of product news, but overuse is causing brand fatigue.

When HCPs are continually bombarded with emails, they stop opening messages, even if the content they receive is relevant. We often hear of HCPs setting up dummy email addresses to redirect the flood of marketing messages away from their day-to-day communications.

AS THE ACCENTURE REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

**“TRULY HELPFUL CONTENT
IS GETTING LOST IN THE
COMMUNICATIONS CLUTTER.”**

— THE NEW RULES OF ENGAGEMENT
ACCENTURE STRATEGY & CONSULTING

To support HCPs, you need to explore other popular digital channels such as webinars or webcasts, and learn how to use these effectively. Putting channel preference at the heart of your data portrait for each HCP will ensure you only engage with them via platforms with which they have an affinity. Finally, you need to make sure you aren't sending the same message via lots of different channels or from multiple departments.

Digital channels may be growing in popularity, but field-sales reps remain vital. HCPs want to be as self-sufficient as possible, gaining quick and easy access to answers on your portal, but they also still value face-to-face interaction. In fact, HCPs [reward](#) pharma companies that demonstrate an understanding of their needs with more of their time and attention.

By unifying data and developing complete portraits of HCPs, reps can make sure their interactions are really valuable, informed by what HCPs are interested in and what they've been exploring recently. Unified data makes face-to-face interactions more meaningful for the HCP and more efficient for teams on the ground.

IT'S TIME TO LEND A HAND

HCPs are stretched at the best of times but, as their patients get more involved and engaged in illness prevention and medical treatment, the pressure to understand the complexities of the pharmaceutical landscape will only grow.

By taking the opportunity to bring together their first-party data, understand who their HCP customers are and what they need, and get their communication channels in order, pharma brands can help to ease the load. They can deliver consistent, relevant, personalised experiences to support HCPs and help them work most effectively in this new on-demand era.

Ready to get started?

Visit acxiom.co.uk/pharmaceutical-marketing
or email us at ukenquiries@acxiom.com.



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