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The Importance of Ethics and Professionalism Among Medical Representatives Towards Doctors

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Abstract

Doctors nowadays rely on medical representative to bring in new technology. Without the presence of a medical representative generally doctors misses out on the latest medical technology and medical advancement. The current Medical Representatives that are being deployed by the Medical Companies are lacking of ethics and sense of professionalism which leads on to lacking of confidence and product knowledge which also causes certain revenue loss to the respective medical company and also the medical industry overall if this pursues on a long term. Medical companies also start to lose out on generating revenue for the company if medical representatives have no excess to meeting doctors for detailing purposes. It is a problem when medical companies have to hire and fire unfit medical representatives and some reps even feel frustration which results in quitting from their position. This research discusses on the various areas of which medical representatives should improvise in order to pursue their personal and the company's goal. Ethical and professional training module have are discussed for future extension of the research.

Keywords *ethics, professional, training module.*

Introduction

Having ethics is crucial among medical representative especially when dealing with professional group of people, in this context are the surgeons, physicians and Medical assistants. Such groups of people are very opinionated and respected in the medical community and not forget very knowledgeable in their field of work. To add to matters, most of the medical representatives around nowadays are not from a medical science background but mostly people who enjoys doing sales and somehow or rather fell into the medical sales industry. When it comes to approaching doctors certain etiquette and ethics should be practiced in order for the doctors to gain trust in the medical representative that would lead to buying the product that is being promoted to them. It is very important for the medical representative to stay relevant and is equipped with the information that the doctors need to hear in order to build that special and strong repo between them. It is a known fact

that both, medical representative and the doctors have a unusual relationship, where the medical representative here plays a catalyst who conveys information on the recent trends on medical diagnostic and keep them always updated on various other newer technology. So when certain ethics are breached due to some unforeseen circumstances, doctors will never trust the medical representative ever again from then on.

What doctors want from a medical representative is to have the viable information that they should present to the doctors and these medical representatives should have confidence in persuading them in order to get the doctors to purchase with no regrets and to purchase goods that will benefit not only the hospital but also their patients. One major goal of a medical sales representative is to be seen as a valued consultant by Doctors. These conversations allow reps to become a valuable resource for their customers. A doctor is always open to new information being brought to them, it is just that the information brought in has to be from a trusted source and this is where the reps stand out if their information is legit and valuable, and doctors will welcome the reps with open arms. Being a resource, or a trusted advisor, allows them to gain new levels of access and sales growth for their products. Reps still need to describe new options and provide more education during a majority of their calls, but understanding their customers' desired outcomes allows them to differentiate themselves by bringing significantly added value to the table.

Ethics and professionalism coincides with one another which plays a big role in holding the position of a medical representative. Professionalism means mainly having the conduct, aims or qualities that characterize a profession which means requiring a specialised knowledge. This means that the medical representative is not only representing the company but also in the product that they are promoting to the relevant doctors. Without being equipped with the skills of being professional, it is utmost difficult to speak the lingual that doctor's speak, which brings down the image of the medical rep themselves and not to forget the company that they are representing. As discussed before, these groups of professionals have very specialised knowledge and their foundation of knowledge is derived from serious thoughtful and years and years of practice and hard work which also includes the achievement of academic qualification. Hence doctors do know what exactly what they want and a medical representative with no skills and confidence stand no chance at negotiating and detailing the product to them. A professional medical representative gets the job done easily and they are reliable which prevents any broken promises. If certain circumstances do arise, they would manage it well enough and make the situation right.

Quality of a Medical Representative should never be compromised no matter what the consequences are. A medical rep from a bigger company compared to a smaller one would most probably have ample of training of all sorts to their sales staff but this does not mean the trainings given were necessarily targeted to benefit the sales team. Training for medical reps should not only contain the product knowledge but also sales techniques, ethics, conduct of professionalism, sales strategy, planning, strategy of calls per day and many other training module to equipped the medical rep. what doctors see nowadays are amateur medical reps with no training on ethics and professionalism with no proper information on

the product they are detailing which further stresses these doctors. Doctors usually have very unpredictable schedule which makes it tough for a medical rep to fix an appointment to actually meet the doctors to promote and when they do get the golden opportunity to meet the doctors it is expected by the doctors for medical reps to understand the needs of the doctors and not just to sell their products. Only a handful of medical reps actually listen to what a doctor's needs. This leads to the dissatisfaction of doctors in medical reps making the best out of the doctor's time taken to listen to their product detailing. In fact only some of the good medical reps have answered the doctor's concerns and question rightfully. What a medical rep should know is before any meeting with a doctor, it is advisable to have all the information of the product in hand including the knowledge of the competitors' product in order to highlight the advantages of the product of their own company. It is also very important to know the background of the medical rep's company. In order to show the company's stability in the industry to the doctors in favour at the same time to answer their enquires of the company's background. It is also crucial enough to have confidence in order to convince the doctors on your product which boils down to the medical rep's selling skills as well. The better they are at convincing and talking, the higher the chances of selling their products to the doctors.

In actual reality, medical representative plays a much more important role than what is seen today. What really happens out today is that doctors tend to avoid meeting medical representative or treats them very shoddily, even with a cold shoulder simply because more and more inefficient medical representative comes in with no ethics and shows no professionalism in them. To make matters worse, doctors are in constant race against time, which time is more precious than any stone or jewel which is why the doctors get very frustrated and sometimes snap at the medical representative for wasting their time if they do not deliver knowledgeable information. The key here is to produce a professional and ethical medical representative for today's modern technology and fast moving hunger for knowledge doctors.

The study here is to create an army of well-equipped medical representatives which also at the same time build their confidence in approaching the doctors in an ethical and professional mannerism. By identifying and rectifying the problem, medical companies can generate more profit by saving on the cost of training and retraining of medical reps due to the fact of high medical representative's turnover and the companies can generate more sales in when the medical reps are fully loaded with efficient and relevant training, chances of closing a deal or sales are higher.

Literature review

Ethics has been foundation of any medical related decision making process. Medical representative have an obligation to follow certain ethics in order not to jeopardize the company's reputation or to get involved in any lawsuit. Company that trains the Medical Representative to use special verbal skill to pressure doctors in buying medical products or medication for treatment shows some unethical gesture (Lyon and mirivel, 2011)

A medical representative should always be smart, well-groomed and dedicated towards their job, having soft skills with good personality and a high Emotional Quotient (EQ) would lead to a success story (Fahimi, 2012). 85% of doctors feel that the current quality and communication skill of personal detailer is poor (Fahimi, 2012). Most medical representative here has no science background and lack of proper communication skills will cause a negative impact on the doctor's impression (Fahimi, 2012).

Ethics is about right and wrong of any actions of a person. A professional person will have code of conduct that they must religiously follow in order to sustain their position in the society or in a certain community. The medical profession has long subscribed to a body of ethical statement developed primarily for the benefit of the patient. As a member of this profession a doctor must recognize the responsibility to the patient first and foremost, as well as society, to other health professional and to self. To emphasize on the statement above, a doctor must have the code of conduct embedded deep within him or her. Part of the profession of the doctor is to alleviate suffering and should at most times put their patient's wellbeing before anything else (Lyon and mirivel, 2011). With all that said a medical rep also falls under an obligation of not presenting data which are false to the doctors. Doctors meet many medical reps all day and all week long which presents to them all sorts of data, information, drugs and medical devices claiming that their product is well versed with patients and other physicians. It is learnt that a doctors meet more than 10 reps in a day which actually pressures them to choose a suitable drug or a medical device to be either administered to the patient or to be used on the patient. Any wrong doing of the doctor would jeopardize the patient's well-being, the doctor's reputation and eventually a lawsuit against the medical company involved. A good example of bad ethical practice is the medical company Merck that was training their medical rep to push the doctors into buying their drugs vioxx. Till today the lawsuit is still standing due to the fact of deceiving their customers which in this context are the doctors in prescribing the pain medication vioxx to their patient. Between the year 2000 to 2004, approximately 60,000 patients dies of heart attack while taking viox(Lyon and Mirivel,2011). This is caused by a medical rep trained to deceive doctors or hinder their ability to make decisions (Lyon and Mirivel, 2011)

One of the theme of the research is to create an awareness of the importance of ethical training to medical Representative (Nagashekhara, syed Agil and Ugandar,2012) and other training module which includes the training the Medical Representative on professionalism and product knowledge, self-grooming, science related studies and soft skills. On the much recent studies which explain more doctors are being very resistant and declining to meet Medical representative are reported increasing. Medical companies are facing difficult environment of doctors resistance to promotion by the company's medical representative (Chressanthis,Sfekas,khedkar,Jain and poddar,2015)

This is an industry that makes billion dollars revenue globally and medical industry here will keep growing and blooming but if the medical companies here deploys "soldiers" with half or no proper weapon to the battle field, they will slowly lose the fight and start to lose

out more than just revenue in the long run. These are just a few theories which the current companies are facing and the medical representatives here are lacking of.

Ethical Training Module

Increasing sales force in ignorance of how important ethics are very high. With many smaller domestic medical companies is blooming, ethical training should be introduced and enforced to produce a good sales force team equipped with knowledge and the ethical behavioral towards the doctors. Ethical behavioral in the field is of critical importance to medical rep, first line and second line managers in either a medical or a pharmaceutical company. (Nagashekhara,syed Agil and Ugandar,2012)

A study shows that 90% of sales force feels that their organization should do what is ethically and morally correct and not just what is profitable to the organization (vershoor,2000). From the business point of view, medical company will continue to focus on generating profits for the company on order to stay afloat and not sink in the industry. There are a variety of business implication, which a medical company should look into which can boost the revenue and profit of the company. One of the tactics is that the sales recruitment and training which increases access limit should cause pharmaceutical and medical company to reflect and improve on their recruiting and training practices both formal and on the job through first-line sales managers of sales rep and more efficient and effective ways to engage healthcare systems (Chressanthis,Sfekas,Khedkar,Jain and Poddar,2015)

The other point is also to look into sales force operation which includes territory alignment, call planning, incentives compensation and objective setting which increases the access to doctors which in long run results better group of ethical reps and increases sales for the product of the medical company.

Professionalism

To understand professionalism, it is necessary to understand the nature of a profession. A medical doctor understands the extension of professionalism especially in the field of medicine and in patient care. To further understand the origin of professionalism, it is important to recognize that certain common characteristics distinguish all professions including medicine. With having said that a medical professional which includes medical assistant and nurses have an obligation of caring for their patients and giving them the best treatment, be it in the terms of respect or even the treatment for illness. To have medical professionals as your customers, there is certain mannerism that needs to be followed which is believed that 0% of medical reps behaves or dresses professionally. Due to that, most doctors agree that personal detailing is losing its effectiveness (Jain, 2011)

Having good communication skills is very crucial to engage to doctors for product detailing and to also convey medical information which could include, continues medical education, new technology, conferences and convention which some medical companies are

willing to sponsor certain group of doctors to gain knowledge and to be exposed to new teachings and learning. 85% of doctors feel that, current quality and communication skills of personal detailer is very poor (Jain, 2011). At the same time 57% of doctors say that if communication skills of MRs are improved, then it may increase sales of product. (Jain, 2011). It is also expressed that 57% of doctors give 2-5 minutes for detailing their product. Hence in that short span of time, the medical reps must be able to deliver the correct and appropriate information and details of the products.

Strong communication skills is very important to acquire as a medical rep because, medical reps are representation of the company and also the product line that they carry along. It is also important because the doctors would want to have medical reps that visits them to know what exactly the doctors need and listening to what the doctors have to say is crucially important as well. This skill can only be acquired through practice and more practice. If the communication between the medical rep and the doctor is engaging, the doctor might consider giving in more time for the certain product detailing. If the doctor feels the medical rep is communicating in the right manner and is giving positive vibes will have higher chances of getting their product sold. It also shows that with the strong communication skills, selling skills here plays a role as well. Selling skills includes being persuasive, having the right negotiation skills, having the confidence and outgoing approach and planning and organizational skills. Being persuasive is something that takes practice to cultivate. For some people it is in built and for the rest it takes practice. It is good to be persuasive but it should be done subtly and not full force which will push the doctors away instead of wanting to meet and talk. Having the right negotiation skill is equally important because as a medical rep, it is important to negotiate in order for to keep the doctors happy and the management of the company happy as well. Having good negotiation skills will provide benefits to the doctors and the medical company involve. At the end of the day it is important to have a win- win situation for both parties involved. The skill of having the confidence and outgoing approach is instilled in medical reps that have been successful in the medical industry. This is what attracts the doctors to be interested in product detailing. Lastly is to have the planning and organizational skills for the medical rep. It is utmost important to have organizational skills because a medical rep's daily schedule varies and they do not meet the same doctors every day. They need to plan carefully so that they hit the target calls per day and at the end of the month, their targeted calls have been achieved. Planning their day to day schedule is also considered a skill, the better they are at planning their daily task, the more doctors they meet at the end of the day.

Being professional also means that, as a medical representative it is very important to attain few qualities to develop the certain characteristics in a person. This is important because the first impression reflects a lot on the medical rep and also to the doctor that is currently dealing with. Being confident, pleasant looking and knowing the product is all qualities that a doctor would look for in a medical rep. Grooming is essential but often neglected. Doctors always look for distinction, appearance, attitude and abilities in a

medical rep. As discussed before, first Impression is how the doctors will be interested to hear what the medical rep has to say.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the importance of ethical and professionalism among the medical representatives here in Malaysia. Being aware of ethical conduct is not only a major plus point for medical reps but also the immediate gaining of trustworthiness of the doctors. When doctors have that confidence in the certain medical reps, chances of purchasing of any products by the medical rep is very high. This study also shows that having the correct skills and knowledge is vital as well. The key here is being able to understand the importance of being ethical and having the professionalism among the medical reps. Having the ethical knowledge among the medical rep here are very limited. Some medical reps do not know what is ethical selling and how to ethically approach the doctors. It may seem very vague in knowing ethical selling and approaching the doctors but it is crucial to create that professionalism between the doctors and the medical reps.

Having that said it is safe to say that many professionals that venture into sales are because they are keen in medical sales. They have the background of sciences but their soft skills are poor. There are percentages of graduates join medical sales also because they want to give the industry a try. These two groups of people are equipped with the background needed but they require training which most medical companies here in Malaysia fail to give adequate training to their medical reps which causes rift between the doctors and the medical reps here which slowly leads to frustrated and demotivated medical reps.

Many other countries have shown great difference in introducing training modules for medical reps of all levels even up to the managerial levels. This training module consists of ethical training, on what is ethical selling and how to approach doctors ethically and the professionalism training module which includes grooming, selling skills and also professionally approaching doctors which creates the trust in medical reps. What the doctors here face is having difficulties in having conversation with the medical reps due to lack of communication skills and the confidence in approaching and detailing about the product. Building the confidence will only come when product knowledge is administered into the training modules. This training module will help to sustain the number of medical reps, to promote the growth of sales and quality of the medical reps and lastly to create a healthy environment between the doctors and the medical reps which leads to generating higher revenue for the medical companies and better understanding of the medical products.

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