JOURNAL OF CLINICAL RESEARCH BEST PRACTICES

Vol. 1, No. 8, August 2005 "Can You Handle the Truth?"

"Pharmaceutical Medical Publications: Winning Physician Support"

Cutting Edge Information, April 2005, 253 pages, $6,995

Review by Norman M. Goldfarb

"Pharmaceutical Medical Publications" is a fascinating report on how the pharmaceutical industry uses scientific (medical) publications to promote its drugs. The report presents detailed information for 16 pharmaceutical products, ranging from niche to blockbuster brands. It includes more than 170 charts and figures. Given its cost, most readers of this report will be involved in managing their company's publication activities.

This reviewer is not an expert in the scientific publication field, so cannot definitively recommend the report, but it appears to be of the same high quality of other Cutting Edge Information reports that the reviewer is able to evaluate. The following remarks may help the reader decide whether to make the investment.

Clinical research generates data for FDA applications. It also generates data for scientific publications. As the rules for marketing drugs to physicians get tighter and tighter, scientific publications become more and more important. Within the obvious objective of building awareness in the medical community, pharmaceutical companies rely on scientific publications for different reasons:

- Build awareness of drugs *before* they are approved by the FDA
- Economically get the word out about innovative new drugs
- Challenge inferior competitors
- Promote specific uses (within the label, of course)
- Compensate for limited sales or promotional resources

New requirements for clinical trial transparency are driving the creation of centralized medical publication departments. The reason is simple: corporate management has more control over centralized functions. Centralization also streamlines communications, standardizes quality, facilitates information sharing, builds functional expertise, and reduces costs.

Some of the interesting findings in the report include:

- Almost half of the companies begin developing their publication strategies in Phase I.
- The top brand of the group was supported by almost $16 million of spending for medical publications. This sounds like a big number, but amounts to less than 6 days of sales for a $1 billion drug. In contrast, the niche drugs averaged about $1 million.
- Blockbuster drugs have publication budgets as early as the preclinical stage, while some niche products do not have budgets until after Phase III.
- In-house employees, on an FTE basis, average more than six manuscripts per year, about twice the productivity of internal or external contract writers.
- In-house employees have a slight edge in quality over external writers, with 58% vs. 50% of manuscripts being accepted for publication. However, the highest-quality work is done by in-house contractors, with a 68% acceptance rate. An important point here is that half to two-thirds of the manuscripts never see the light of day.

- In contrast to the missed deadlines of most clinical trials, the surveyed medical publication departments actually produced *more* manuscripts than were planned.
- Over half of the companies require at least five years of experience for new hires, while less than 20% look for a scientific background.
- Almost two-thirds of the companies say they follow International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICJME) standards, although perhaps not with respect to the use of ghost writers. It is possible that the others follow equivalent or stricter internal standards.

The report is available at http://www.cuttingedgeinfo.com/.

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