Attitude of Retail Chemist towards Medical Representative: A Survey

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Abstract: Retail chemist retains a unique place in pharmaceutical marketing. Medical representatives get vital feedback from retailers on what is happening to company's products and how they are moving, competitors' activities, their future plans. The objective of study was to analyse attitude of retail chemist towards medical representatives. The survey indicated that according to retail chemist the medical representative perform useful service to the medical profession by way of providing information on price and discounts, availability of drugs and drug use.

Introduction

"Marketing is an organizational function and a set of process for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stake holders".[1]A pharmaceutical sales representative is a vital link between the company and the medical professionals, distributors, retailers. The pharmaceutical sales representative is the source of communication. A genuine feedback is given by sales representative to the company, on what is happening to the company's products in the market place, how they are being perceived, what- competitors are doing and what are the customer demands/suggestions/complaints etc. As we go back to the history of pharmaceutical marketing, it reveals that the first pharmaceutical sales representative appear on the scene in 1850s in the United States.[2] Unfortunately there is no solid evidence to show when and how the pharmaceutical sales representatives appeared in the Indian pharmaceutical market. Sales representative in pharmaceutical marketing are called as Medical representative. They promote the company product to the customer that is physicians. Promotion is a method utilized to tell the customers about product, place and price. Promotion has two basic elements 1) to provide information about product 2) to persuade potential customers[3].A pharmaceutical sales representative has to perform crucial tasks in pharmaceutical marketing[4]. But as part of customers' relation management process, companies need to take into consideration views expressed by retailers and wholesalers in pharmaceutical marketing.

Retailers and Wholesalers

Retailers and wholesalers are also very important. Retail chemist retains a unique place in adding value to the end-user that is patients. The retail chemist has become an important intermediary between the patient and physicians[5]. People feel comfortable and less intimidated dealing with local retail chemist as compared to doctors. Visits to these trades too have to be planned in a systematic manner. Visits to the retailers and wholesalers give vital feedback on what is happening to companies products and how they are moving, competitors' activities, their product movement, their future plans. Many studies have been done in past on expectations of doctors from medical representatives. Studies on expectations of retail chemist from medical

representatives are very few as per literature search. As retail chemist retains a unique place in pharmaceutical business, companies need to understand their attitude towards medical representatives who represents the company.

Objectives of study

The present study was designed to understand the attitude of retail chemist towards medical representatives.

Research Methodology

The study was based on non-probability convenience sampling of respondents through a structured questionnaire which contains three types of questions namely multiple choice questions, open ended as well as closed ended questions. In case of closed ended questions respondents were asked to tick the most appropriate answer and in few they were asked to give the order of preference. The nature of study was exploratory study which involved both primary research and secondary research. The primary data was obtained from retail chemists through a self-administered questionnaire. The secondary data was collected from various sources which include articles published in journals, E-journals and technology data bases. The study was conducted in South India. The total sample size selected for study was 150 retail chemists out of which 143 responded. Analysis and interpretation of the data has been carried out to deduce the conclusion. The data is presented in the form of tables.

Results and Discussions

Table 1. Usefulness of medical representative to medical profession

Usefulness of medical representative		
Response	**Number**	**Per cent**
Yes	141	98.6
No	2	1.4
Total	143	100.0

Survey indicated that 98.6% of the respondents feel that medical representatives perform a useful service to medical profession. Only two chemists mentioned that representatives perform no useful service to medical profession.

Table: 2.Source of information

Source of information		
Response	**Number**	**Per cent**
Information about availability of drugs	37	26.1
Information about drug use	32	22.5
Information about the prices and discounts of products	73	51.4
Total	142	100.0

51% respondents said that medical representatives give price and discounts information on regular basis. 26.1% of respondents said that medical representatives give information related to availability of new drugs into the market. 22.5% of respondents feel that many times medical representative give vital information about drug indication and its use.

So, overall medical representatives play vital role in providing basic information about drugs.

Table: 3. Number of representatives chemist sees in one day

Number of representatives chemist see in one day		
Response	**Number**	**Percent**
Less than 5	44	31.0
6 - 10	91	64.1
More than 10	7	4.9
Total	142	100.0

Most of the respondents 64% said that they see 6 to 10 medical representatives daily. A small number 5% said they see more than 10 medical representatives, while 31% respondents said they see less than 5 medical representatives a day.

Table: 4. Ideal interval between visits

Ideal interval between visits		
Response	**Number**	**Per cent**
Less than 20 days	44	30.8
21 - 30 Days	80	55.9
More than 30 days	19	13.3
Total	143	100.0

Majority of respondents 55.9% said that ideal interval is 21 to 30 days, a significant percentage of respondents 30.8% said, less than 20 days is the ideal interval. Few respondents 13.3% said that ideal interval should be more than 30 days.

It is also interesting to note that some chemist wants to meet more medical representatives to update their information related various new drugs to be launched in the market.

Table: 5.Medical representative should be accompanied with his superior

Medical representative should be accompanied with his superior		
Response	**Number**	**Percent**
Strongly Degree	14	9.8
Agree	30	21.0
Neutral	64	44.8
Disagree	30	21.0
Strongly Disagree	5	3.5
Total	143	100.0

Survey indicated that 44.8% of respondents were neutral on the question, whether medical representative should be accompanied with superior. 21% of respondents agree on this question. Chemist feel that its company matter, they are comfortable with representatives of companies.

Table: 6. Reason for coming to chemist

Reason for coming to chemist		
Response	**Number**	**Per cent**
Strongly Agree	8	5.6
Agree	24	16.8
Neutral	50	35.0
Dis Agree	54	37.8
Strongly Disagree	7	4.9
Total	143	100.0

From above data 37.8% of respondents disagreed to the question posed. 35% of respondents were neutral on this question. While 16.8% of respondents feel that medical representatives come to them, when the sale of product is low. They try to identify the reasons for the same.

Table 7.: Influence of medical representative on dispensing of products

Influence of medical representative on dispensing of products		
Response	**Number**	**Per cent**
Very Much	22	15.4
Quite a bit	18	12.6
Very Little	39	27.3
None	64	44.8
Total	143	100.0

44.8% of respondents said that they are not influenced by Medical representatives in their choice of drugs in dispensing, especially when it comes to over the counter drugs. 27.3% indicated they are influenced by MR.

Table: 8.Minimum Qualification for medical representative

Minimum qualification for medical representative		
Response	**Number**	**Per cent**
Matriculation	10	7.0
Science Graduate	38	26.6
Diploma in Pharmacy	52	36.4
Bachelor of Pharmacy	43	30.1
Total	143	100.0

The most frequent answer was diploma in pharmacy 36.4%. Next answer was bachelor in pharmacy 30.1%, next comes science graduates 26.6% and a insignificant percentage of respondents 7% told that matriculation should be the minimum qualification.

Author asked question to all of the respondents who responded to 'Diploma or Bachelor in pharmacy' that why they want D.Pharm or B. Pharm as minimum qualification for medical representative, few retail chemist told that it is a waste of time for them to meet medical representative who do not have product knowledge, meeting them is just a formality but whenever they meets a medical representative having D.Pharm or B.Pharm degree it is easy for them to ask questions and get answers. So the study reveals that majority of retail chemist wants a medical representative who is good at product knowledge and can provide scientific information. That is why they think that MRs should have B.Pharmor D.Pharmas their Minimum qualification.

Table: 9 General behaviour towards medical representative

General behaviour towards medical representative		
Response	**Number**	**Percent**
Tend to ignore always	10	7.1
Will ask to wait for him	16	11.3
Welcomes but have tendency to discourage	16	11.3
Welcomes but never give competitors information	23	16.3
Welcomes and give information about prescribing behaviour of doctor	76	53.9
Total	141	100.0

53.9% of respondents said that usually they welcome and give information about prescribing behavior of doctors. 16.3% of respondents said they welcome but never give information about prescribing habits of doctors and even competitors' information. 11.3% of respondents welcome medical representatives, but do not entertain in providing the information. 11.3% of respondents ask medical representative to wait during peak hours. 7.1% of respondents ignore medical representative due to one or other reasons.

Conclusion

Based on the primary and secondary research following conclusions were drawn:-The survey indicated that the medical representative perform useful service to the medical profession by way of providing information on products and supplying samples. Majority of retail chemist think MR provide useful information on price and discounts, availability of drugs and drug use.

Most of the respondents felt that they are less influenced by the medical representative in the selection of drugs in dispensing. Most of the chemist told that diploma or bachelor in pharmacy should be made minimum qualification for medical representatives.

Retail chemists prefer to those medical representative who are regular, sincere in claims and courteous. It appears from the survey that the medical literature or advertisement leaflets are not that much useful to chemists.Majority of respondents welcome medical representatives and give vital information about doctors prescribing habits. They also provide information about other pharmaceutical company activities.

Overall retail chemists play vital role in providing feedback regarding doctors, competitor's information which may help pharmaceutical companies to make marketing strategies for development and sustainability of the business.

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