

Six Keys to Collecting Better Medical Insights

January 20, 2020

By Richard Olsson

If you're like most medical affairs organizations, your field-based staff (medical science liaisons or MSLS) have been collecting medical insights for years now, if not a decade. It most likely started as an informal process and insights may have been gathered simply via e-mail. The situation has dramatically changed over the past couple years. Collecting medical insights has become a primary focus for many pharmaceutical and biotech companies, and effectively analyzing these collected insights has become a major challenge. This article will focus on how to better collect insights, and in a subsequent post we'll explore how to better analyze those insights. The first step to better analyzing insights is to more effectively and efficiently collect them in the first place.

Based on more than 17 years of experience in helping our clients collect meaningful insights, we've identified 6 key components to collecting better insights:

Training and Education

MSLS¹ must be adequately trained to identify what constitutes an **insight**. Generally, an insight is observed knowledge of the healthcare

¹ For ease of understanding in this article, we've use the term "MSL" to mean anyone who submit insights. Of course, any medical affairs member should have the ability to enter insights.

environment qualified with a thought leader's (TL) interpretation and opinion of that knowledge. A good insight is:

"A regional TL has six patients enrolled in the CURE-ALL trial. Five of the six patients have reported reduced nausea and fatigue. Based on these results, the TL is comfortable recruiting additional patients for the trial and believes subsequent approval of this indication will benefit many of his patients."

We often see "insights" where only the cursory facts are reported:

"TL has six patients enrolled in the CURE-ALL trial."

This is not an insight! What makes the information truly an insight is the TL's perspective and the subsequent actions they have or will take.

To facilitate analysis of collected insights, MSLs should also be trained on how to best write an insight. The medical affairs community loves abbreviations. The problem is that there are a multitude of abbreviations used for the same term. Additionally, MSLs may attempt to spell out a term, resulting in varying misspellings. Who can correctly spell all those drug names and disease states anyway? **Having a defined set of abbreviations can make the process go more smoothly—while achieving greater accuracy.** Writing in complete sentences and proper use of capitalization, among other techniques, will make insights clearer and easier to read, understand, and analyze.

Lastly and most importantly, training should also include applicable company policies and SOPs (standard operating procedures).

Key Strategic Topics

Collected insights should align with your company's key medical strategies (KMS). Of course, MSLs should be educated on what the medical strategies are and kept updated with any changes.

A company's collection tool should have a field from which the applicable medical strategies are selected. Key medical strategies serve two purposes:

- 1) KMSs provide guidance to your field force on the insights they should be looking for.
- 2) KMSs facilitate the segmentation of insights for downstream analysis.

CRM Independence

Many companies have their insight collection process integrated with their CRM system. This provides a tendency for MSLs to enter "interaction notes" as opposed to true medical insights. CRM integration also provides a tendency for MSLs to submit an insight with each interaction when often there is no insight. This floods the analysis portal with background noise, which makes insight analysis more difficult and time consuming.

Another challenge with collecting insights through your CRM system is that those insights are associated with a specific thought leader. It is not anonymous. **MSLs are more likely to submit more discerning and candid insights when the information is from an anonymous source.** TLs are

more likely to provide detailed information as well. Additionally, it will make your legal team much happier not having a record of what individual TLs said. Anonymous collection also makes the MSL management more comfortable with sharing collected insights with the wider medical affairs team. It's better to refer to TLs in insights in vague terms, like "a regional TL in the southeast U.S." If it becomes absolutely necessary to identify the source of a particular insight, that information can always be obtained.

Effective and Efficient Collection App

While the Collection App is often thought of as a simple form, **having a well-thought-out and simple-to-use Collection App increases the quality of collected insights and facilitates their analysis.** Insight qualifying fields should be kept to a minimum and designed to segment insights for specific stakeholders. Having separate field choice configurations for each therapeutic area or specialty MSL team reduces the number of field choices an MSL must scroll through, simplifies input, and reduces errors. **The ability to take and attach a picture creates a simple way to convey a multitude of information without having to type a lot of text.** For example, an MSL might upload a photo of a poster or slide they saw during a congress. The app should be readily available on a phone or tablet—on- or off-line—so that insights can be recorded when they are first encountered and fresh in one's mind. Lastly, **the field choices must be kept current and have the ability to be updated quickly to keep up with changing strategies and initiatives.**

Cast a Wide Net

While your field-based medical team is the primary source of insights, almost every discipline within Medical Affairs encounters valuable medical insights in the course of their work. Missing one critical insight might just be an insight with significant strategic implications. **Allowing all medical affairs team members to enter and view medical insights promotes transparency and inclusion** and brings the medical affairs collective mind trust to bear on the interpretation, analysis, and subsequent actioning of insights.

Provide Ongoing Feedback

We discussed the importance of training above. Once training is complete, **MSLs should be constantly reminded of the importance of recognizing and recording the insights they encounter, until the practice becomes second nature.** We don't recommend setting insight quotas, as that will result in submissions that are not true insights, but rather potentially irrelevant data that's submitted simply to meet quotas.

Instead, **provide ongoing feedback to MSLs on the insights they've submitted so they know their efforts are valued and appreciated.** Complete transparency allows MSLs to learn from their peers on what are good insights and encourages them to submit more and better insights. In subsequent posts we will discuss how to better analyze insights, including the use of artificial intelligence.

ECT Technologies LLC partners are subject matter experts in the operational aspects of global medical affairs including field medical, CRM, medical document management, speaker management, KOL/HCP inquiry, medical insights, medical strategy planning, and clinical trial management.

#medicalaffairs

#msls

#actionableinsights

#medicalinsights