



CRA Insights: Life Sciences

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Aligning internal teams to secure buy-in from external stakeholders: a critical part of launch strategy

The commercial success of a new pharmaceutical product depends on the buy-in of disparate stakeholders, each with individual priorities. Potential hurdles to commercial success include regulatory approval, national and regional market access, and physician and patient acceptance and uptake, to name a few. Each stage of the development cycle involves an ever-widening group of stakeholders. Not only does the number and variety of decision makers and their influencers continue to grow, but the opportunities to engage with them are becoming progressively more convoluted given the variety of communication channels required, the continual exchanges among external stakeholders, and the regulations governing interactions with them. Securing the buy-in of these influential external stakeholders requires pharmaceutical companies to look inward and encourage cross-functional collaboration to engage early and often along the path to launch and beyond.

Planning and managing interactions early on pays long-term dividends

The complex external stakeholder environment requires earlier planning and a deliberate sequencing of cross-functional activities. Pharmaceutical companies that understand the differing and evolving roles of external stakeholders as facilitators, influencers and decision makers at various points of the product lifecycle benefit from external insights and input that can be invaluable in planning development activities and an effective launch. From the outset, these companies engage with key stakeholders, including regulators, payers and policy makers, physicians, patients, and advocacy groups, to execute product and communications strategies focused on shifting stakeholder priorities and delivered at the right time in a consistent manner.

From functional silos to collaboration

Whilst all functions, from Medical Affairs and Regulatory to Marketing and Market Access, contribute to strategy development, a silo mentality with limited cross-functional collaboration still exists in many companies. The issue often centres on the misalignment of motivations and measures of success among functions. This can lead to an ineffective, short-term and function-centric approach to strategy development.

CASE STUDY

The challenge: ‘How do you maximise the success of a global market access programme and avoid launch delays?’

The strategy: Align the aims and external communications of different functions early on

Situation

- Global pharmaceutical company with a new product in development, some years pre-launch
- Limited alignment across functions in terms of positioning aims and communications with external stakeholders
- Potential negative impact on global market access programme

Actions

- Identify, prioritise and evaluate various external stakeholder interests
- Develop and agree core messaging across cross-functional group comprising R&D, Medical Affairs, Health Economics, Commercial and Key Affiliates
- Tailor messaging to needs of each stakeholder group
- Delivery plan spanning six years

Results

- All internal stakeholder groups aligned around common position and messaging focused on priority audiences
- Continual adaptation of the clinical programme to address payer and patient needs in areas such as outcomes in patient sub-populations and quality metrics
- Market prepared for launch well in advance
- Last minute tactical activities minimised
- Launched on time

Pharmaceutical companies benefit from a strategy that supports long-term planning around the current and future needs of all external stakeholders. Accordingly, a cross-functional team is required to develop a shared understanding of the evolving interests and priorities of a wider group of external influencers to achieve a coherent product strategy that meets stakeholder needs throughout the product lifecycle. Such a strategy can only be achieved through a genuinely collaborative approach from the outset.

During development, a constructive dialogue needs to be initiated among the functions regarding stakeholder expectations. This dialogue can become an important driver of a product’s long-term commercial success, helping to align strategy, product messaging and the management of stakeholder relationships to identify and address issues that could impact future commercial potential.

Early collaboration between R&D and Commercial ensures that clinical programmes are positioned to meet the needs of payers and patients as well as regulators and the clinical community. In addition, interactions with external stakeholders can be aligned from a commercial and clinical value perspective, working towards ROI in scientific and commercial terms early in the development phase.

Coordinating at the local level at launch and beyond

Different markets require individual approaches given local pricing and reimbursement dynamics, physician preferences and patient needs. Therefore, key affiliates need to be involved early to ensure country nuances are reflected in product strategy where appropriate, including clinical development and health economics and outcomes research (HEOR) planning, and regulatory and commercial strategies. To optimise launch and ensure a product is commercialised with the local market needs in mind, pre-launch activities require significant cross-functional collaboration at the local level to align local product messaging and stakeholder engagement within countries with the global strategy.

CASE STUDY

The challenge: ‘How do you maximise the chance of a favourable HTA outcome?’

The strategy: Aligned and rigorous stakeholder engagement by multi-functional brand teams

Situation

- UK affiliate of a global pharmaceutical company with inconsistent views on medical and commercial positioning
- Need to coordinate and engage key stakeholders
- Tactical support required

Actions

- Development of value proposition across cross-functional group to support health technology assessment (HTA) submissions and external engagement – Clinical, Medical Affairs, Commercial
- Cross-functional steering group to plan and drive programme
- Multi-disciplinary advisory board to provide external perspective on strategy and argumentation
- Proactive engagement with patient advocacy groups
- Close coordination with external relations team

Results

- Internal buy-in and alignment
- Programme delivered in a coordinated fashion
- Effective relationships established with key stakeholders
- High profile media coverage
- Favourable HTA outcome

Too often pharmaceutical companies underestimate the need for continued, coordinated engagement across functions and local teams after launch. Over the long term, a collaborative approach ensures that product strategies evolve to meet the needs of all external stakeholders, and supports the growth and protection of wider company reputation. In addition, external stakeholders can inform the development of future product strategy rather than being perceived as potential barriers to successful commercialisation.

A simple concept, but hard to implement effectively

Pharmaceutical companies will benefit from starting the conversations with external stakeholders early during development and continuing them throughout the product lifecycle. This effort will lead to longer term engagement of all functions and a unified go-to-market approach.

Buy-in from senior leadership is essential to embed cross-functional collaboration. We recommend establishing an adaptive governance structure, with senior representation from relevant teams at key planning stages of the development programme. The challenge remains to engage the different functions effectively, and ensure that they all benefit from the collaboration, enabling them to add value more widely across the product lifecycle. To overcome this challenge, we recommend an approach which:

- Ensures internal buy-in to the value of wider ranging and longer term external relationships whereby all functions deliver beyond their remit on any one product;
- Demonstrates the need for cross-functional alignment and consistency;
- Ensures that all functions are cognizant of and contribute to reputation building through their interactions with external stakeholders.

When done successfully, this effort supports stronger product and company reputation, builds longer term relationships with external stakeholders, and creates development and commercialisation strategies that deliver products which meet market needs.

At CRA, we deploy IMPETUS™, our methodology for early engagement and communication to help clients interact more effectively with payers, clinicians, advocacy groups and other stakeholders throughout the product lifecycle.

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