

Understanding the PCP Dilemma

Identifying the factors that determine specialist referrals

With over 250,000 PCPs in the US, many pharmaceutical marketers view Primary Care Physicians as a primary target, however they can be hard to reach given their sheer volume. In addition, marketers tasked with creating impactful messaging for more advanced treatments - often find themselves challenged with where to focus communications with PCPs. Should it be centered on direct patient care or specialist referrals? Healthcare insight specialists at BuzzBack have recently coined this the 'PCP Dilemma.' Realizing the burden this obstacle was placing upon their own clients, and wanting to support them in developing and prioritizing communications in this shifting landscape, they conducted their own study involving 200 PCPs across 3 therapeutic categories (including gout, asthma and major depressive disorder).

Setting the Stage

First, the team knew it was important to shed light on general PCP behavior. More specifically, to gain context around how PCPs feel about their roles, what motivates them to practice medicine, and even certain personality traits. Visual and creative, projective techniques (featured inset), elicited feelings, thoughts and emotions while traditional probes provided insight into current perceptions of their roles. Generally speaking, they express overall satisfaction and happiness, even with the challenges that infiltrate their day-to-day. These include: systemic institutional challenges (insurance hurdles, fear of medical malpractice), everyday challenges of patient issues (e.g., compliance), and struggles with time and resource constraints.

eCollage Example

“Treating major depressive disorder is difficult and requires a lot of time and patience, sometimes is very difficult to do right in a busy practice.”



Evaluating Characteristics to Predict Referral

To better understand how these factors impact the referral process, PCPs were classified into low rate referrals (those managing 70% or more of their patients alone) and high rate referrals. Comparing the 2 groups revealed relevant characteristics in predicting who would be LESS likely to refer out patients.

Email Advice to Younger Self

Dear Younger Self...
Your career in medicine will be challenging, time consuming and at times frustrating. However, it will be rewarding and satisfying to help patients and worth it overall.

Primary Predictors

- specialize in family practice
- lower concern for malpractice risk
- exhaust all treatment options before referring
- office-based rather than hospital-based
- prescribing injections/infusions

Secondary Predictors

- more comfortable with risk and diagnostic uncertainty
- feeling less inhibited by insurance coverage issues
- believing they have time & resources to provide the best care

Key Takeaways

Further knowledge of PCP characteristics can help predict the likelihood for referral and better inform your marketing strategy. These 3 action items helped the team test and confirm that clarity in tough to reach target markets is possible.

1. Further segmenting your target

- Who you *should* and *should not* market to enables you to precisely target & prioritize.

2. Building awareness & educational campaigns for your products can aid in education

- In this instance, PCPs who refer less because they are unaware of all options.

3. Conducting influencer mapping and targeting

- Campaigns that target *who* PCPs listen to (conference presenters, journal authors, etc) may have a 'ripple effect' in furthering education.

We know that 'Patients are People,' but it's important to remember that PCPs are people, too. Human-centered, holistic techniques can provide insight into thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and day-to-day challenges allowing you to segment further and target your messaging more effectively.