
Editorial

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Our planet earth is in danger! Consumers are daily exposed to evidence of global warming, environmental catastrophes and the negative impact of industrial and by implication, technological development. We are also beginning to see, especially among the youth, an increasing suspicion concerning the benefits of investment in biotechnology innovation as the debate rages concerning genetically modified foods, cloning and nanotechnology. It is against this backdrop that the recent European Commission's annual scoreboard of companies' spending on R&D announced that corporate R&D has increased by 10 per cent, with EU-based companies increasing their R&D investment by 7.4 per cent. The world's biggest investor in R&D in the 2007 Scoreboard is Pfizer, with €5.8bn. The life science sector will always remain R&D-driven, as innovation moves from laboratories, hospitals and universities through a complex technology value chain. Pharmaceutical companies continue to claim that their investment in R&D is under-appreciated by policy makers and the general public and the link between prices of innovative drugs and R&D investment is perceived as rather tenuous by decision makers across the globe. At the same time, major companies are indeed slashing sales and marketing resources in response to a wave of patent expiries, thin pipelines and cost-containment pressure.

Do physicians, who remain the primary target of medical marketing, believe that new drugs represent innovation in its purest sense? The long development times, the proliferation of me-too products and

the sometimes exuberant claims made in sales and marketing materials certainly ensure that most physicians have a jaundiced view of advances in therapeutics. In a sense, our constant trumpeting of innovation has become counter-productive. We need to be cognizant of the strength and weakness in credibility of the pharmaceutical industry claim to be innovation-driven.

What can pharmaceutical companies do better to leverage the 'innovation message'? Over the years, most attempts to integrate sales and marketing input into the early stages of the value chain, R&D, have not been very successful. But today, technology is supporting a much closer relationship between marketing and research. For example, rational drug design and personalised medicine make a strong case for ensuring that the voice of the customer and end-user are heard earlier in the development process. Similarly, the integration of diagnostics and therapeutics or the combination of drug, delivery system and disease management using IT, permit us to consider a much closer working relationship between the marketer and scientist.

Pharmaceutical companies are becoming leaner and more agile, and while these changes have been driven by harsh economic and market realities, they present an opportunity to truly market innovation. The challenge for medical marketers is to put more science into the art of marketing and ensure that the art of marketing makes a contribution to the science of drug development. It is no longer enough to segment, brand and sell — as the return of these activities is

constantly eroded by the realities of the market. On the other hand, communicating innovation and building partnerships with physicians based on a real and mutual commitment to cure disease and improve patient wellbeing is resource intensive. Much of what we currently do as medical marketers can hardly be described as innovative. There is a need for research into new ways of doing sales and marketing and much of

this research has to be focused on optimising the structure of pharmaceutical, biotechnology, medical device and health service companies to ensure that they can indeed optimally interact with the networked customer.

LEONARD LERER

Managing Editor

leonard.lerer@journalofmedicalmarketing.com