



Digital Opinion Leaders and HCP Influence Mapping

Roundtable Leader: Sandra Shpilberg, CEO & Co-Founder, Adnexi

In an era of rapid digital transformation, the Medical Affairs function stands at the forefront of incorporating innovative methods for disease awareness and key external relationships. During the Medical Affairs Professional Society Meeting in 2025, a group of Medical Affairs experts convened to discuss emerging trends shaping our industry. This roundtable featured Medical Affairs leaders who explored two interrelated topics—Digital Opinion Leaders (DOLs) and Healthcare Professional (HCP) Influence Mapping. Although distinctly focused, both areas underscored how Medical Affairs professionals must adapt in a changing healthcare landscape. Below are the key learnings gleaned from the session.

Introduction: The Evolving Role of Medical Affairs

As healthcare grows more connected, the role of Medical Affairs in guiding evidence-based discussions has never been more crucial. Traditional models of engagement, primarily one-to-one or reliant on conventional publishing avenues, are no longer sufficient or appropriate to address the rapidly evolving digital environment. Many Medical Affairs teams now recognize that their strategies must extend far beyond scientific congresses or academic journals. The nexus of expert opinion, patient engagement, and real-time data is shifting to digital platforms where people, from potential patients to routine practice clinicians to thought leaders, congregate for shared knowledge.

The year 2025 marks a critical turning point: patients and HCPs alike increasingly rely on the internet for real-time medical advice, community-driven insights, and emerging research. Digital medical content transcends geographic barriers, enabling knowledge exchange that was once limited by physical and institutional constraints. Within this dynamic context, Medical Affairs professionals at the roundtable agreed that success hinges on proactively embracing digital innovations and applying it by therapeutic area in a customized way. Digital Opinion Leaders and robust HCP Influence Mapping are two key pillars supporting the future of effective medical communication.

Digital Opinion Leaders (DOLs)

Redefining Opinion Leadership

For decades, Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) shaped scientific discourse through peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations, and recognized expertise within their specialty. While KOLs remain indispensable, the panel emphasized the rise of Digital Opinion Leaders (DOLs)—HCPs, patient advocates, and allied professionals who exert significant influence in online spaces. These individuals maintain active social media channels, and other platforms that frequently attract targeted audiences.

DOLs often hold dual roles as clinicians and content creators. According to data cited in the document discussed at the roundtable, **60% of adult internet users** in the United States search for health information online¹. Further, **70% of online health seekers** report that the information they found online influenced their decision about how to treat an illness or condition². This underscores how powerful digital footprints have become in informing medical decisions.

DOLs, therefore, serve as key conduits for HCP audiences, providing digestible content on complex topics such as new treatment guidelines, clinical trial outcomes, or novel therapeutic modalities.

Best Practices for DOL Collaboration

Collaboration models might include co-developing educational webinars, contributing to patient Q&A sessions, or providing educational content for digital conferences. Ultimately, Digital Opinion Leaders amplify the reach of credible medical information, building mutually beneficial relationships which foster improved patient outcomes as well as ongoing professional development.

Roundtable participants emphasized that therapeutic areas may require varying approaches. For example, in a disease with an already existing high-level of online educational activity the approach focuses on finding, ranking and engaging the right DOLs. In a less active or more rare disease, the approach begins with DOL formation. DOL formation is the process of collaborating with potential DOLs to investigate their willingness to take a leadership role in online disease education. This task could be compliantly accomplished with a DOL Advisory Board meeting, as well as individual outreach to explore collaborating on online disease education.

¹ Center for Disease Control, Health Information Technology Use Among Adults: United States, July-December 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db482.htm>

² Pew Research Center, The Online Healthcare Revolution, November 2000. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2000/11/26/the-online-health-care-revolution/>

HCP Influence Mapping

Understanding the Shifting Landscape

With the interplay of in-person and online engagement growing ever more complex, roundtable speakers drew attention to a structured approach known as HCP Influence Mapping. Influence mapping is a process of surveying peers to understand the HCPs that are most influential in a particular therapeutic area at the local, national and global levels. Traditional methods of identifying key influencers—such as relying solely on publication metrics—may no longer capture the full spectrum of individuals shaping clinical practice.

Key Components of Effective Influence Mapping

The panelists provided feedback on Adnexi's systematic approach for HCP Influence Mapping, and highlighted the importance of peer-to-peer influence surveys. When implemented correctly, HCP Influence Mapping offers multiple benefits. It can inform outreach strategies, ensuring that Medical Affairs initiatives resonate with the most impactful voices in patient care. Further, accurate influence maps reduce redundancies in stakeholder engagement, allowing Medical Affairs to optimize resources and avoid overwhelming the same individuals with repeated requests.

Conclusion: Building the Future of Medical Affairs

The 2025 Medical Affairs Professional Society Meeting underscored a new paradigm for healthcare engagement. Digital Opinion Leaders exemplify how expertise can extend beyond peer-reviewed journals to reach global audiences seeking timely, accurate, and accessible information. Meanwhile, HCP Influence Mapping demonstrates the value of a structured, data-driven approach to understanding networks in an increasingly interconnected medical community.

For Medical Affairs professionals, these insights serve as both a roadmap and a call to action. Embracing digital platforms, forging compliant collaborations with DOLs, and committing to sophisticated influence mapping strategies will empower organizations to remain relevant and impactful. By doing so, Medical Affairs can uphold its core mission—advancing clinical knowledge and improving patient outcomes—amidst the fast-paced currents of digital transformation.

Acknowledgements - Roundtable Participants:

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