

Building relationships: How Medical Affairs can advance healthcare improvement

Pharmaceutical companies add enormous value to healthcare systems globally with the development of innovative therapies. The question, however, is how to bridge the gap between clinical research and real-world clinical application?



Medical Affairs plays a pivotal role in helping innovative treatments reach patients who need them and thus in advancing patient-centered care.

While this support is in portfolio-relevant disease areas, it is not product-focused, and thus offers a neutral voice to drive healthcare improvement – for example through disease education, evidence-based insights on patient outcomes and sharing of successful care models

How Medical Affairs leads the way

Deeply understanding clinical practice, Medical Affairs can act as strong partner for the clinical community helping accelerate practices that lead to better healthcare outcomes, improved access, health equity.

Driving awareness and sharing evidence on patients' unmet needs throughout the healthcare journey highlights areas that need to be addressed for healthcare providers and a broader range of stakeholders. Medical Affairs can also enter scientific and practical exchange with health care providers – or engage in collaborations and partnerships – acting as peers with deep understanding of the natural history of disease and disease burden, treatments, patients' risk tolerance and sharing new evidence beyond efficacy and safety, including outcomes of priority to patients such as health-related quality of life (QoL).

How multi-stakeholder collaboration drives patient and healthcare outcomes

Where these efforts are most effective is when carried out in partnership with other stakeholders to drive real change and better patient and healthcare outcomes.

In its vision for Medical Affairs by 2030, The [Medical Affairs Professional Society](#) (MAPS) noted that the role will continue to evolve from ensuring “people know things” to building long-term relationships with external stakeholders, including physicians, payers, patients and patient organizations. MAPS tasks Medical Affairs teams to lead the way to “a new partnership between industry and society for the benefit of all.”

TPOs: A best practice in Medical Affairs?

Many companies have established Medical Affairs-driven partnerships in various countries to address major health concerns, including cardiovascular health (Novartis), diabetes (Eli Lilly and Novartis) and oncology (Lilly). One model that stands out as an example of transformative Medical Affairs practice is [Target Population Outputs \(TPOs\)](#). Initially developed at Novartis, TPOs are a novel disease modelling tool that is specific to a patient population rather than a treatment. The objective behind TPOs is to support collaborative ways to achieve population health targets by way of:

- > Leveraging resources to create effective, efficient, equitable, and responsive personal and public health services
- > Identifying priority areas of innovation by quantifying individuals with unmet need.

TPOs have been used to facilitate public–private partnerships (PPPs), focused specifically on improving health outcomes at the population level. One such example is a Collaborative on Strategic Public Private Partnerships to [transform cardiovascular health](#) that has brought together Novartis, Novo Nordisk, and Harvard Health Systems Innovation Lab. The partnership has worked together to [revolutionize cardiovascular care](#) in Colombia with a focus on cholesterol testing, as well as diabetes and obesity prevention.

Lilly has initiated several public–private partnerships in different regions, collaborating with governments, regulators, academia, and patient advocacy groups. In Taiwan, for example, the company has [partnered with the National Health Research Institute](#) (NHRI) to accelerate the development of precision medicine. The partnership combines Lilly’s oncology expertise with NHRI’s clinical research capabilities with the goal of creating a better healthcare environment for patients and healthcare providers. The company has also launched several patient support programs in Taiwan aimed at addressing affordability as well as disease awareness education campaigns.

In China, through its [Lilly Expanding Access for People \(LEAP\)](#) initiative, the company is striving to help address the country’s diabetes burden by collaborating with primary care physicians at the community level and providing training to support the accurate diagnosis and treatment of diabetes, as well as the education of patients.

[Novo Nordisk](#) partners with the EU’s Innovative Health Initiative (IHI), the world’s largest PPP framework within the health technology and life sciences fields. Its partnerships span multiple disease areas including diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease, liver diseases, and rare diseases. One notable example is the company’s [Cities Changing Diabetes](#), which involves patients, policymakers, healthcare professionals and non–governmental organizations in the co–creation of policies aimed at encouraging lifestyle changes to help people living in urban areas to avoid, manage and treat type 2 diabetes.

As a concept, initiatives such as these along traditional Medical Affairs tools of fostering scientific exchange and providing medical education have the potential to help advance better care. As a strategic partner, Medical Affairs is strongly positioned to “lead” healthcare improvement, driving cross–functional alignment and securing the long–term commitment needed for success.

Nurturing multi-stakeholder relationships

Given the complex and ever-evolving nature of the pharmaceutical industry, the priority must be to find ways to bring various stakeholders together to focus on delivering value to patients.

Medical Affairs can play a central role in driving this collaboration by building strategic PPPs, focused on high-value, large-scale initiatives designed to improve health outcomes at the population level. By aligning strategy and pooling resources, these partnerships can address mutually defined problems, based on the principles of trust, transparency, integrity, interdependence, learning, and iterative improvement.