

The Outlook from Biopharma Commercial Leaders: What to Expect Next

By Peter Gallagher

As the global population navigates the challenges, uncertainties and tragedies of the COVID-19 pandemic, the biopharma industry has responded with admirable focus, collaboration and resilience. The global R&D engine has mobilized and come together on a common objective as never before. In the US, pharmacies and hospitals have kept medicines in stock, thanks to the resilience of the biopharma supply chain.

While C-Suites grapple with day-to-day challenges for their organizations and stakeholders, we have heard from several executives and Chief Commercial Officers that this is a moment to be particularly thoughtful about both the immediate and longer-term impacts of the pandemic to their organizations.

Let's start with the field sales forces, which were pulled from doctors' offices and hospital corridors weeks ago and have been literally grounded. For co-workers who derive so much of their energy by interacting and engaging with others, this can be an exceptionally challenging time.

As one pharma Sales & Marketing executive shared, "These colleagues often ascribe much of their satisfaction at work to the personal connection that they feel when they engage with a physician or a nurse. They get reenergized because they know that there is a patient who may benefit on the other end of that interaction." As these detailing activities have gone virtual overnight, its important to think about how to help these people manage and restore their energy.

Some questions to ask yourself and your team: What are you doing to keep your front lines engaged and energized? How can you support the healthcare practitioners who may be on the frontlines right now? What is the right mix and speed of rolling out new technologies to the field?

At the same time, we are hearing positive stories of how technology is bridging the physical divide. The President of a multi-billion dollar primary care business shared how he and his team quickly moved their 2,000-person sales force to tele-detailing. “With the shutdown in the field, we immediately shifted to focusing on clinical education and value-based selling. The doctors are telling us that they are happy because they can engage on their terms and their schedules, which so far we’re seeing means longer interactions and higher attendance rates. Our reps were skeptical at first, but they are shifting to see that our technology tools are helping them get to docs that they couldn’t reach before, because of geography or just not enough time in the day.”

A biotech CEO, running trials in dozens of sites globally, reflected on how his company is working to support physicians make informed clinical decisions without seeing them in person. “By necessity,” he said, “We are getting more focused and sharpening our digital tools. We’re asking clinicians: What are the barriers for you to deliver your best care? What don’t you have answers to that we can help with? There is no doubt that today’s environment will be a catalyst for the use of technology more broadly, but it’s too early to know how broad the impact might be. What is clear is that the winner will be the one who helps the clinician perform better in delivering patient care.”

New tools are also coming into play, says one Chief Commercial Officer, who recently left a career in pharma for the OTC nutritionals space and shared her excitement about the availability of data innovations in the retail/consumer segment. “As an industry we have struggled for decades to accurately measure the impact from our Advertising and Promotional spend,” she said. “Today’s big data and AI tools are benefiting other industries, and I see one potential outcome of this unfortunate tragedy as perhaps the moment when these tools fully cross the bridge to the pharma sector.”

As you think through your approach to commercial leadership and take stock of your organization for a post-COVID world, you may want to consider these questions:

- How can you restore your organization to its best form, as quickly as possible?
- How much does your commercial model need to evolve in the post-COVID world?
- What will you take from yesterday into the future, and what is better left behind?

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Covid-19 Micro-Website

We have launched a micro-website where this and other informative pieces are posted. This site will be regularly updated: [click here](#) for further details.

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