



REUTERS EVENTS™

# MEDICAL AFFAIRS VERSUS AN EXPLOSION OF DATA:

## Focusing on Insights That Matter

How the industry is generating, collating and disseminating insights that inform organisational strategy

Produced in Conjunction with

**Within3** |

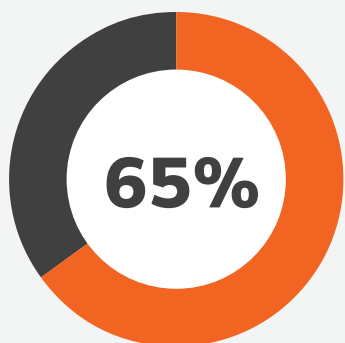


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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Medical Affairs leaders are being consulted more than ever as key strategic partners within organisations. As medical insights become increasingly critical, the key challenge is to work out how to harness data from proliferating digital channels and integrate it to provide the most value. This white paper will examine the tremendous opportunity Medical Affairs teams are stepping into within organisations, and how they are adapting to effectively generate, collate and action insights from the available data.



of respondents cite **“risk to launch”** as the main impact of not getting the insights they need

**“THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE WHEN WE COLLECT SO MUCH INFORMATION IS TO GAIN COMPREHENSIVE INSIGHTS TO INFORM OUR FUTURE STRATEGIES AND TO GAUGE OUR CURRENT LEVEL OF TACTICAL EFFECTIVENESS.”**

Andrzej Smyk, Global Medical Director, Merck Group

The report analyses our 2023 survey of over 200 Medical Affairs leaders and is enriched by in-depth discussions with industry experts to explore how teams are working to process, integrate and act on large volumes of data from various sources.

It will look at the tools Medical Affairs teams are using now—including digital insights platforms, advanced analytics and automation tools, and AI to help streamline insights management.

Finally, the paper will probe expert predictions for the future and the enormous potential of AI and automation as these tools advance, to help Medical Affairs step into a leading role.

## THERE IS GROWING RECOGNITION THAT WORKING SMARTER IS CRITICAL TO THE BOTTOM LINE

The cost to develop new therapies continues to increase on a per-drug basis, making the financial impact of failure excruciatingly high. One way to mitigate this risk is through improved strategy and holistically informed decision-making.

Respondents to our survey see a clear link between the quality of insights and launch success, with 65% of respondents citing “risk to product launch” as the main impact of not using insights effectively to inform strategy.

## MEDICAL AFFAIRS COULD HAVE ENORMOUS POWER AND INFLUENCE WITHIN ORGANISATIONS

There is the potential to help improve the speed at which pharma improves, innovates and operates by adding significant value through actionable insights. However, if the Medical Affairs function cannot demonstrate the impact of those insights, they may be slow to reach their full potential as a strategic partner within the organisation.

# INTRODUCTION

For some years, pharmaceutical companies have been grappling with the challenge of rising drug development costs, imminent patent expiries—expected to put over \$200 billion in annual revenue at risk by 2030—and payers seeking evidence of better patient outcomes from therapies to optimise the use of limited resources. (1)

As such, the stakes have never been higher for avoiding product failures, for demonstrating the efficacy of existing therapies and for supporting insights-driven decision-making.

Pharmaceutical organisations are relying more on science and data as the cornerstone for meeting their obligations to patients and customers. They also seek to use data-derived insights in novel ways throughout the value chain.

Medical Affairs teams are being called upon increasingly to extract valuable insights from a wealth of data sources, including clinical, research, healthcare and social media, to address these challenges.

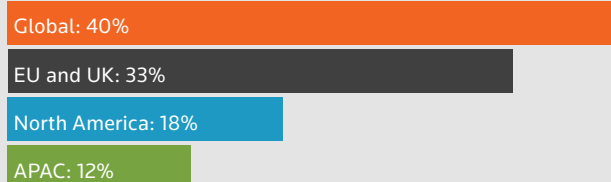
We surveyed over 200 Medical Affairs executives and spoke with seven industry experts about how they approach insights generation and management for various purposes, their maturity and automation levels, pain points, strategies, tactics and tools.

We discovered that insights management is fragmented and mostly ineffective, with teams scrambling to fulfil the role and demonstrate value. Organisations are developing diversified approaches and capabilities to accelerate innovation—and propel Medical Affairs into a leading role.

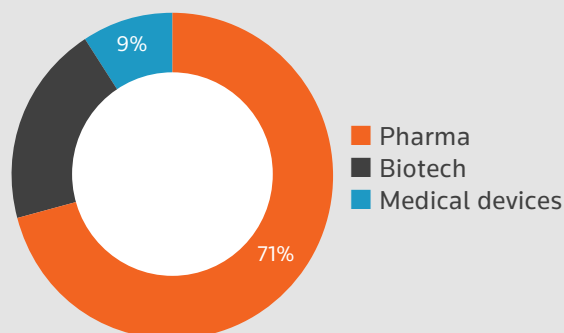
## About the survey

243 senior Medical Affairs executives took part. The largest portion (40%) had global responsibilities. Most worked in pharma organisations (71%) and the majority were director-level or above (70%).

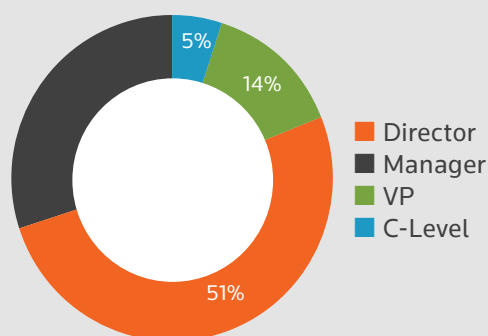
### GEOGRAPHICAL RESPONSIBILITY



### TYPE OF ORGANISATION



### LEVEL OF SENIORITY



# WHY STREAMLINE INSIGHTS MANAGEMENT?

## COLLECTING, COLLATING AND INTERPRETING DATA IS OFTEN DISORGANISED

Our survey reveals a strong recognition among Medical Affairs of the importance of gleaning insights and actioning them, something many admit they are still struggling to do.

Creating actionable insights first requires organisations to collect the right data from the right sources. Next, they need to integrate it, analyse it to generate insights, prioritise those insights and disseminate them in a way that drives action. Finally, they need to gather evidence of use and impact.

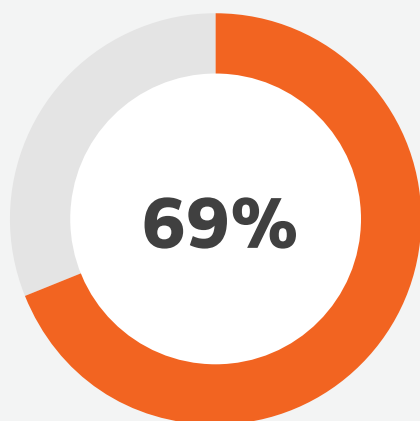
Survey findings reveal that a significant majority of Medical Affairs teams—69%—struggle to organise, integrate and analyse data coherently.

## THE PROLIFERATION OF DIGITAL CHANNELS AND ACTIVITIES

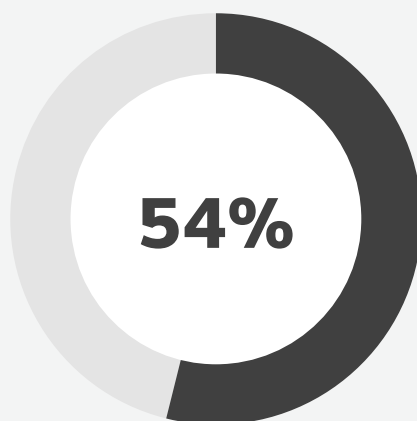
The volume of data and the range of sources available has grown exponentially thanks in part to digital innovation in healthcare and changes in engagement norms—both spurred on by COVID-19.

Slightly over half of the survey respondents, 54%, use less than a quarter of the data they collect to derive value, with 40% agreeing that they “collect so much data it’s difficult to know what to focus on to generate insights”.

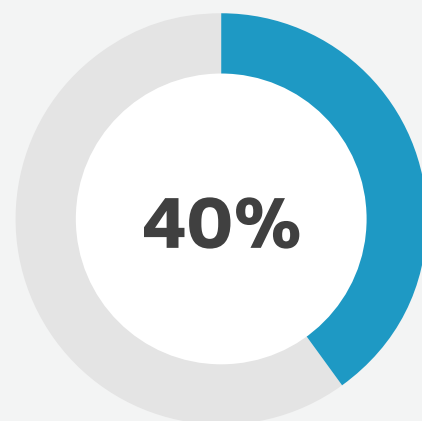
Insights generation has changed dramatically in recent years, says Gurinder Sidhu, US Senior Medical Director at Pfizer, who describes pre-COVID-19 insights generation as a much slower “one-way street” involving MSLs reaching out to and waiting to hear back from target HCPs to collect insights.



of respondents struggle to **organise, analyse** and use the data collected coherently



of respondents use **less than a quarter** of the data being collected to generate insights



of respondents are **inundated by data** and agree they collect so much that focusing is difficult



**How would you best describe the collection of data for generating insights in your organisation or team?**

■ Data collection is highly automated   ■ Data collection is somewhat automated or tech-enabled   ■ Data collection is highly manual

"Now, there are so many more avenues to collect data and insights", says Sidhu. "Including real-world data and real-world evidence, which has been a phenomenal change to the landscape. It used to be much more difficult to get data so quickly".

Rather than organise in-person advisory boards, digital channels offer a more convenient and cost-effective way of gathering insights through virtual advisory panels, social listening, digital health tools and hybrid events that combine in-person and digital channels. Importantly, digital channels often offer a way to demonstrate ROI thanks to the data they provide.

The challenge, says Sidhu, is to glean useful insights from the data. A task that most organisations are only beginning to come to grips with.

Andrzej Smyk, Global Medical Director at Merck Group, agrees that data blindness is a huge problem: "The biggest challenge when we collect so much information is to gain comprehensive insights to inform our future strategies and to gauge our current level of tactical effectiveness".

**"NOT MUCH IS AUTOMATED. EVERYTHING REQUIRES MANUAL ASSESSMENT OF DATA."**

Marleen van der Voort, Executive Director Scientific Content & Insights at Global Medical Affairs, Astellas

**"THERE ARE SO MANY MORE AVENUES TO COLLECT DATA AND INSIGHTS; IT'S BEEN A PHENOMENAL CHANGE TO THE LANDSCAPE."**

Gurinder Sidhu, US Senior Medical Director, Pfizer

**MANUAL COLLECTION AND ASSESSMENT OF DATA**

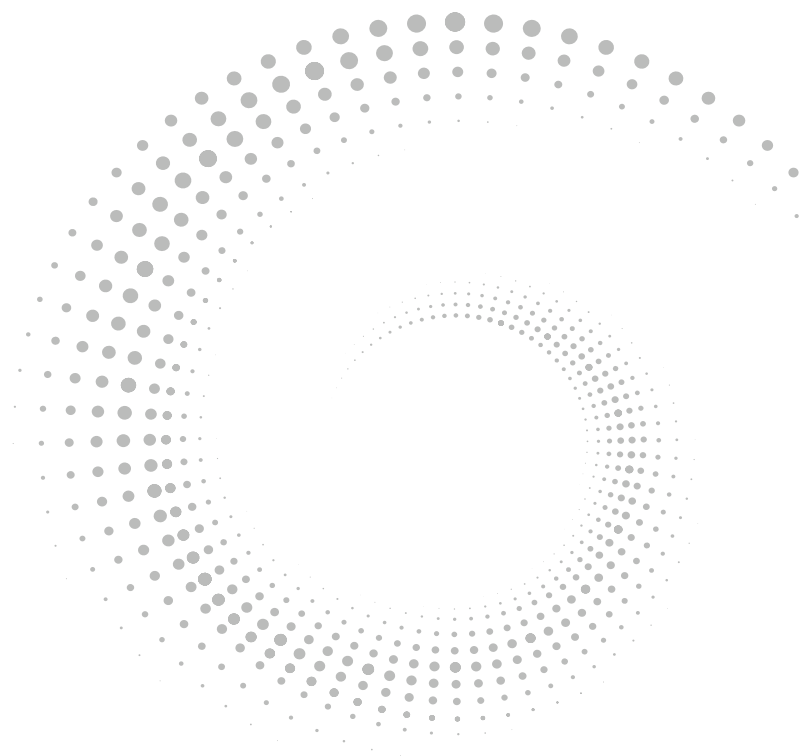
Despite the rapid adoption of digital channels and the resulting explosion of data, the technologies and processes often used to collect, integrate and analyse data have remained largely unchanged over the past decade, indicating an urgent need for modernisation.

Data analysis is commonly manual, taking place on spreadsheets and absorbing many resources. Marleen van der Voort, Executive Director of Scientific Communications & Content at Global Medical Affairs at Astellas, tells a typical tale: "Not much is automated. Everything requires a manual assessment of data. For instance, for medical information requests we receive, we identify some insights through assessment of meta-data; however, people need to go into the system and assess the trends manually to identify the truly valuable insights".

Arron Mungul, Director of Medical Capabilities for International Markets at BMS and Co-Lead of the Strategy and Launch Excellence at the Medical Affairs Professional Society, describes the situation similarly: "After data collection, you have a series of numbers, but without context the numbers don't really tell you anything apart from volume [of comments on a particular topic, for example]".

Mungul points out that while an algorithm can flag volume to highlight a potentially important insight, the system is still mainly manual, and misleading flagging of insights is common.

“Markets are keen to have their voice heard and their level of importance elevated”, says Mungul. “We have discussions with colleagues that are highlighting insights which for them might be important, but when you contextualise it amongst all of the insights that are coming in from around the world, it might not necessarily be a key insight. It might just be background noise.”



### Survey respondents gave us insights into the current data **collection** processes:

“Some functions don’t collect enough data for analysis (but think they do), while other functions collect a lot of data for analysis.. It’s still fragmented at my company, but we are actively working to standardize and centralize data capture, insights analysis, and pull-through of insights into action plans”.

“We do not ask the right questions of the data”.

“It is not all ‘black and white’. For some topics we probably have enough data to generate good insight, while for other topics we could do better and focus more to make sure we have the right data”.

“We collect a ton of data but none of it is aggregated, and we don’t know the first thing about turning it into insights”.

“We generate good data from what we have. We could generate more but do not have the manpower of funds to meet that goal”.



# EVOLVING INTO A STRATEGIC PILLAR

## FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE DEPENDS ON INFORMED DECISIONS

Escalating drug development costs, forthcoming patent terminations and growing pressures related to pricing mean higher risk for drug companies launching new products. The key to reducing these risks lies in making informed decisions based on the right insights.

Survey respondents acknowledged the significant impact of insights on profitability, with 65% identifying “risk to product launch” as the primary consequence of not having access to insights when shaping their strategic approach.

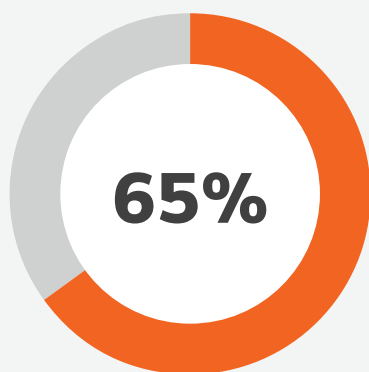
An analysis by Deloitte found that approximately 70% of products that fail to meet launch expectations continue to fall short in subsequent years, whereas 80% of those that “meet or beat” expectations continue doing so. (2)

Top reasons for underperformance included areas where insights from Medical Affairs can prove critical, such as a need for more comprehensive expertise in specific disease areas and a shortfall in understanding the needs of various stakeholders.

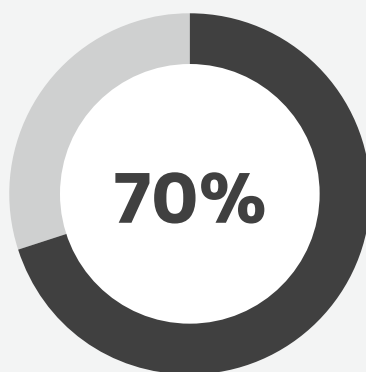
## MEDICAL AFFAIRS IS NAVIGATING A GROWING LEADERSHIP ROLE

It has become increasingly recognised that Medical Affairs is important to guide strategy; and is predicted to become the “third strategic pillar of the organisation alongside R&D and Commercial” by 2025, according to McKinsey & Company. (3)

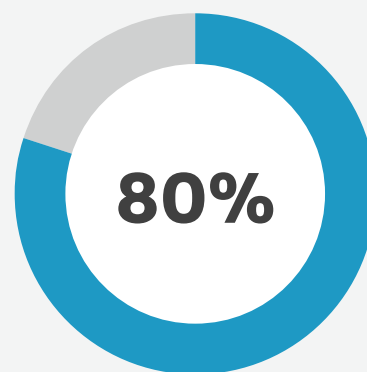
As part of the evolution, Medical Affairs leaders are honing strategies and identifying new tools to unravel the data-to-impact pipeline. In some organisations Medical Affairs are influencing how investigational products are launched and gaining access across different markets, using RWD to influence medicine development decisions, and improving clinical trial design enrolment and retention. The potential benefits of leveraging an efficient system for generating and actioning medical insights are great, and the power and influence of Medical Affairs could continue to grow substantially.



of respondents cite  
**“risk to launch”**  
as main impact of  
suboptimal insights



of underperforming  
**launch products**  
continue to underperform



of successful  
**launch products**  
continue to meet their targets



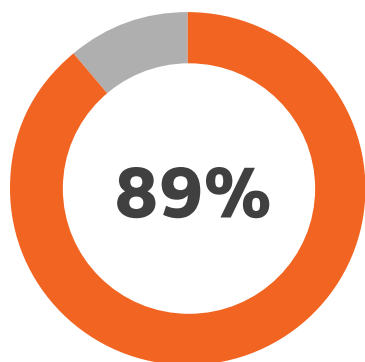
### GAINING INTERNAL INFLUENCE

According to Michael Kahn, Medical Affairs Operations Lead at Spark Therapeutics, Medical Affairs is often denied its rightful place at the table: “When it comes to planning, commercial tends to have the keys to the car. They may not let anybody inside until the GPS has been plotted, the snacks have been bought and everything is set, at which point you can only do so much”.

For many, planning and strategy have already become more collaborative in some areas, such as HCP engagement. With expanding access to RWD potential use cases for RWE are also increasing. RWE can enable label expansions, support marketing authorisation applications or identify commercially viable rare disease areas, presenting numerous opportunities for improving healthcare outcomes.

**“WHEN IT COMES TO PLANNING, COMMERCIAL TEND TO HAVE THE KEYS TO THE CAR. THEY MAY NOT LET ANYBODY INSIDE UNTIL THE GPS HAS BEEN PLOTTED, THE SNACKS HAVE BEEN BOUGHT, AND EVERYTHING IS SET, AT WHICH POINT YOU CAN ONLY DO SO MUCH.”**

Michael Kahn, Medical Affairs Operations Lead,  
Spark Therapeutics



of respondents said that  
**demonstrating the value of  
Medical Affairs as an insights hub**  
was a priority or somewhat of a priority for 2023

### DEMONSTRATING VALUE WILL BE CRUCIAL TO WINNING INFLUENCE

Survey respondents indicated that demonstrating the value of Medical Affairs as an insights hub for the organisation was an important goal in 2023, with 89% saying that it is a priority or somewhat a priority.

For Medical Affairs to gain more influence at the leadership table, it must prove the value of the insights it can bring, says Lance Hill, CEO of Within3. Otherwise, Medical Affairs risks losing out on limited resources and funding to other functions and forfeiting a significant portion of its potential.

“If you can’t show impact measurably, it’s easier to be dismissed”, says Hill. “If you can demonstrate an impact on R&D, on the drug pipeline, on the commercial side of the business— how medically informed scripts are performing in different parts of the world, for example— then you can show an impact on revenue”.

According to Hill, Medical Affairs leaders must proactively manoeuvre into a strategic position: “I think it starts off with a push. You have to show you are valuable before people ask you your opinion”, says Hill.

Proactively generating and imparting insights and opinions on R&D or commercial strategy is key. “If they’re mainly reactive, they won’t optimise their forward-looking role”.

Spark Therapeutics’ Kahn suggests one way to gain more influence is through gold-standard strategy workshops comprising input from all relevant stakeholders.

Importantly, well before the point of tactical implementation, all significant functions, including Medical Affairs, should have had the opportunity to contribute viewpoints and insights.

### A PLETHORA OF UNTAPPED OPPORTUNITIES

The trust HCPs have in Medical Affairs means a deeper level of access to customers in real-time than any other part of pharma organisations. Moreover, they have the ability to engage in more in-depth conversations with customers compared to R&D or commercial functions, enabling them to acquire more comprehensive insights.

Organisations can use medical insights to make informed strategic decisions during the drug development process. In the R&D pipeline, for example, medically informed decisions can save companies money by enabling them to pivot or course correct earlier. Better yet, medical insights can help them avoid some strategic missteps altogether.

### DECISION-MAKING WITH MEDICAL INSIGHTS FROM ALL RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

Survey respondents indicated that decisions are frequently made without insights from all relevant stakeholders, with 70% of respondents indicated that this “sometimes” happens, and 11% indicating that decisions are generally not being informed by relevant stakeholders.

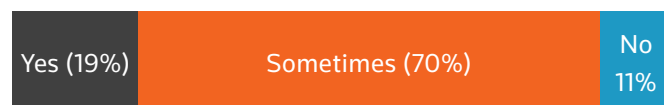
When asked which stakeholder insights should be considered more when making decisions, 78% of respondents selected patients, 77% of selected specialist physicians or surgeons, and 70% selected payers.

Pharma can improve patient outcomes using medical insights into patient experiences, concerns and unmet needs. Insights can be interpreted to a deeper level through Medical Affairs teams, helping to identify better treatment endpoints, design more patient-friendly clinical trials, plan more realistic clinical trial enrolment criteria and timelines and subsequently improve patient outcomes.

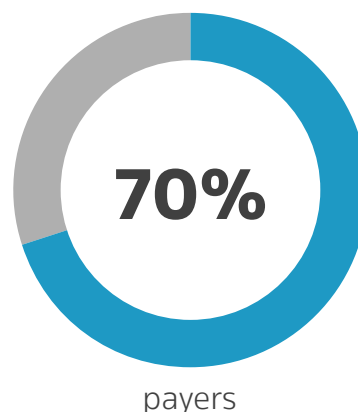
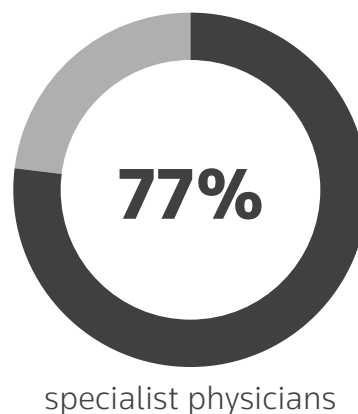
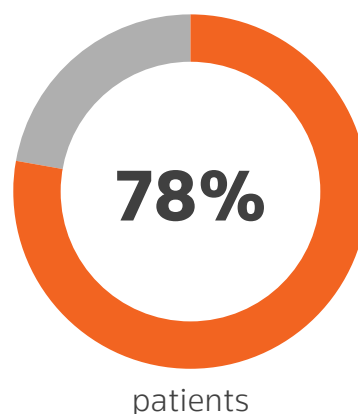
Insights from social listening can help identify KOLs and DOLs (digital KOLs that use social spaces to share thoughts with numerous followers) to help forward market access efforts.

The use of RWD and RWE is also increasing dramatically, encouraged by a more favourable regulatory environment and government-led initiatives, such as the Data Analysis and Real-World Interrogation Network (DARWIN) from the European Medicines Agency for generating RWE, and guidance published by the FDA on data standards for product submissions containing RWD. (4-6)

### Are the insights you are using for decision-making informed by all relevant stakeholders?



### Which stakeholder insights should you be considering more when making decisions?



# UNCLUTTERING DATA COLLECTION

Companies are struggling to collect and convert data to insights and then optimally and efficiently impact strategies and plans. The first step towards streamlining is to tackle obvious bottlenecks and inefficiencies, such as manual data collection and analysis.

A common observation made by survey respondents and interviewees alike was the feeling of being overwhelmed by an inundation of data from MSLs, and proliferating digital engagement data.

## HOW CAN DATA COLLECTION FROM FIELD TEAMS BE ORGANISED TO HELP STREAMLINE ASSESSMENT?

One approach is to pre-sort data ready for analysis. "Our insight process has evolved towards a data-driven model," says Sidhu. "We've created specific topics that we're interested in for each product. When the field team enter data, they're sorted by topic, and this helps guide the insights that are coming back." Topics are chosen according to strategic questions that have been identified and are updated regularly.

**"OUR INSIGHT PROCESS HAS EVOLVED TOWARDS A DATA-DRIVEN MODEL. WE'VE CREATED SPECIFIC TOPICS THAT WE'RE INTERESTED IN FOR EACH PRODUCT."**

Gurinder Sidhu, US Senior Medical Director, Pfizer

**"EXTERNAL DATA SOURCES ARE DYNAMIC AND RAPIDLY CHANGING AND THIS IS GOING TO STAY THE SAME."**

Arron Mungul, Director of Medical Capabilities for International Markets, BMS

Another recommendation comes from Victoria Ho an Independent Medical Excellence Consultant specialising in insights management for Medical Affairs. Ho suggests field team training and alignment with internal aims can help alleviate data overwhelm: "We came to the solution of constant training of the MSLs and the managers holding them accountable for making insights actionable."

## EFFICIENTLY SOURCING DATA FROM DIGITAL CHANNELS SUCH AS SOCIAL MEDIA OR DIGITAL HEALTH TOOLS

External data sources are dynamic and rapidly changing, says Mungul, and this is going to stay the same. However, Mungul predicts that in the future, a single, integrated data pool will bring all sources together to be analysed.

Each digital channel has its own distinct method of data collection, which can complicate the integration of additional channels into decision-making processes. The absence of an efficient system to consolidate the data can make gathering feedback more challenging.

Consistent data collection and aggregation into a single, organised data pool for analysis, can help later to generate insights more efficiently and create a holistic understanding of an issue from multiple angles. This can be helped by third party service providers.

## Ask the Experts

### Q. How can data collection be organised to help streamline assessment?

#### Field team data collection

**A.** “Our insight process has evolved towards a data-driven model. We’ve created specific topics that we’re interested in for each product. When the field team enter data, they’re sorted by topic, and this helps guide the insights that are coming back.”

**Gurinder Sidhu**, Pfizer

**A.** “We came to a solution of constant training of the MSLs and the managers holding them accountable for making insights actionable.”

**Victoria Ho**, Independent Medical Excellence Consultant

#### Other channels

**A.** “We’re in rare-disease CGT, so the volume of data we collect is smaller [than a typical medical affairs team]. That said, I would love systems to be able to monitor the environment. Whether that’s social or conference monitors, to filter out insights automatically and generate a report. We’re predominantly gathering insights from one-to-one interactions and organising and analysing them, but it’s not scalable.

**Michael Kahn**, Spark Therapeutics

**A.** “A more automatic approach to collecting and analysing data from different sources could help. Grouping insights by topic or by interest, and then analysing them separately to find correlations between different topics and relating them to faults, which would be helpful to define a new strategy.

**Andrzej Smyk**, Merck Group

# UNRAVELLING INSIGHTS GENERATION

After collecting a vast quantity of data from various sources, the next step to tapping into its potential is collating, analysing and understanding the data – in other words, generating insights. Asking questions before interrogating the data is important and can help prevent distraction or overwhelm.

## DATA SILOS ARE OBSTRUCTING INSIGHTS GENERATION AND MANAGEMENT

Mungul identifies the siloed nature of the pharmaceutical industry as the main barrier to achieving efficiency in generating and managing insights, stating that “As an industry, we are still operating in a relatively siloed manner”.

Survey respondents agreed, with 76% indicating that how data and insights are stored and shared in their organisations has led to data silos that obstruct the efficient generation and sharing of insights.

Corporate affairs might pick up an insight from a chat on social media channels about adverse events, says Mungul. “But how does that get through to Medical Affairs to be

aware of and manage? There’s still a disconnect between the functions within an organisation, and determining what is actually worthwhile to action is a big challenge”.

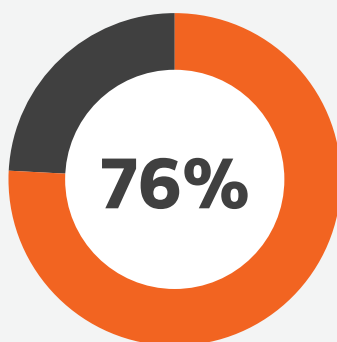
Part of the solution for generating insights efficiently comes down to creating clear processes and deciding how to define and triage insights, whether manually or automatically, says Ho.

Ho believes that even small organisations would benefit from investing in a third-party platform to “get the right connectors into systems like box folders, SharePoint, SAP and P&L systems that look for market changes”.

Partnering can be an efficient route for triaging and analysing data, according to Ho, and pharma organisations should resist the temptation to attempt to build the necessary systems themselves:

**“WITH ALL THE BEST WILL IN THE WORLD, A PHARMA COMPANY IS GOOD AT MAKING AND RESEARCHING TREATMENTS AND IS NOT AN IT COMPANY. SO LET THE IT TEAMS AND VENDORS DO WHAT THEY’RE GOOD AT TO INTEGRATE YOUR INSIGHT SYSTEM.”**

**Victoria Ho, Independent Medical Excellence Consultant**

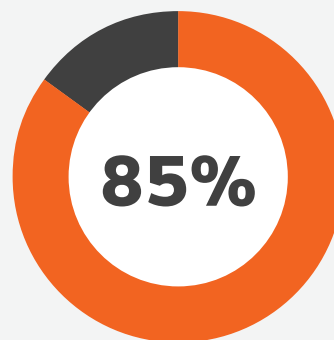


of respondents consider storage of data and insights has created **obstructive data silos** hindering efficient insights sharing

# HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY & TOOLS

Along with an explosion of data has come an explosion of technology providers to help harness it. Choosing who to partner with or which software to invest in will directly affect how streamlined and productive an organisation's insights pipeline will be.

Currently, there are a number of tools and technologies for insights management. CRM bolt-ons that allow tracked communication between databases are common ways to pool data. AI algorithms and advanced analytics have resulted in some improvements in the assessment of insights. Innovative web-hosted platforms can connect and feed into previously siloed systems and collate and assess data from an array of external channels. Finally, various data visualisation packages such as Tableau or Microsoft BI allow data to be simply cut and displayed in easily adaptable dashboards.



of respondents using a **single insights management system** say it helps them generate and share insights more effectively

**"WE HAVE SOME INITIAL PILOTS AROUND AUTOMATION, AND PROOF OF CONCEPT HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED, BUT THE SYSTEM STILL NEEDS A LOT OF HUMAN INTERVENTION TO TRULY IDENTIFY INSIGHTS AND TRENDS."**

**Marleen van der Voort, Executive Director Scientific Content & Insights at Global Medical Affairs, Astellas**

## CONSOLIDATING DISCONNECTED DATA SILOS IN A SINGLE SYSTEM

There are a large and growing number of data streams within pharmaceutical organisations, and internal structures often involve siloed information separated by function or disconnected IT systems.

The survey revealed that a large majority of respondents that use a single insights management system (85%) find this helps them generate and share insights more effectively.

Insights can be gathered across various channels such as social media, HCP advisory boards or patient advocacy groups, and organised according to organisational priorities to help separate valuable insights from noise more quickly.





## WEB-HOSTED PLATFORMS

As part of a prior leadership engagement, Ho was closely involved in the development and implementation of the global insights systems at BMS and Jazz Pharmaceuticals over the last 7 years, particularly focusing on technology functionality, process flows and human factors, such as user behaviour and dissemination.

According to Ho, many organisations are reluctant to invest in large-scale innovative solutions because they struggle to see the savings it could offer their organisation in terms of manual insights processing time.

“Most companies idea of going beyond a series of meetings or spreadsheets to manage insight is using CRM modules as the gateway for field insight to enter their business. But I think there’s an opportunity to go beyond these CRM bolt-ons”, says Ho. “There are several innovative solution providers out there doing great things with web-hosted platforms that can pull from and feed into other existing systems in the company”.

## AI AND AUTOMATION

Automation and AI have helped pharma make headway in recent years at reducing time spent manually checking data, but there is still a long way to go. “We have some initial pilots around automation”, says van der Voort at Astellas. “Proof of concept has been established, but the system still needs a lot of human intervention to truly identify insights and trends”.

Similarly, a bespoke AI tool for analysing MSL insights has reduced the manual burden somewhat for Mungul, but the output remains heavily reliant on humans.

“Much of the output from our AI tool ends up in a spreadsheet which we have to manually filter and interrogate for nuggets of insights that are actually actionable”, says Mungul. “We still require someone with a degree of experience within Medical Affairs to elevate or take the actions”.

Insight generation from medical information inquiries has been streamlined by partnering, meaning that data is collated, analysed and categorised to order. Data can be cut by therapy area, market or type of enquiry.

## Are You Ready To Consolidate Your Insights Management Efforts?

- Web-hosted platforms can be customised to collate, analyse and prioritise insights from a range of sources, both externally and internally
- The challenge of multiple, disconnected systems can be overcome by using a complete, integrated insights management solution
- CRM bolt-ons allow tracked communication between databases
- Data visualisation tools can integrate data from a range of sources and deliver highly customisable and agile cuts of the data
- Per-team solutions can be cost-effective and convenient ways for insights generation and sharing
- Bespoke AI and automation can help to sort data and flag potential insights, but they still require a great deal of human intervention
- Third-party specialist vendors can collate and analyse data according to your priorities and deliver back pre-prioritised



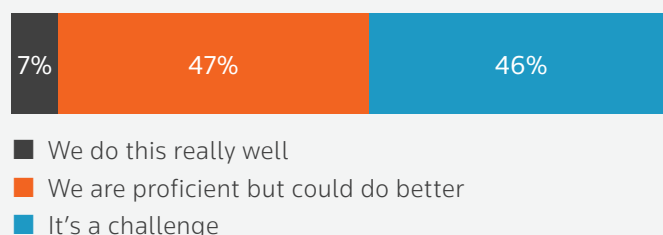
# EXPERT TIPS ON HOW TO ACTION INSIGHTS

According to Sidhu, insights are the main driver behind medical information and content supplied in the field, and deciding what insights should be actioned and shared is one of the most important yet difficult functions he performs. The main concern is whether an issue is large enough or serious enough to pick up on:

***“WE WANT TO MAKE SURE THAT WE’RE HONING IN ON WHAT IS IMPORTANT AND DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT – CREATING MEDICAL EDUCATION CONTENT, TALKING TO OTHER RELEVANT GROUPS WHO MIGHT THEN STEP IN. IT’S IMPORTANT; IT’S DIFFICULT.”***

**Gurinder Sidhu, US Senior Medical Director, Pfizer**

## How would you describe the task of sharing Medical Affairs insights across your organisation?

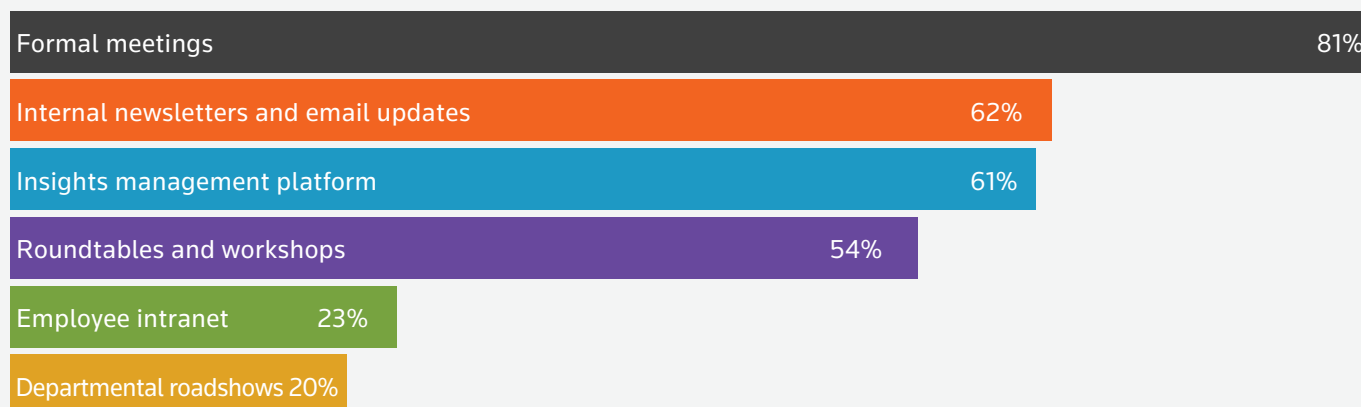


If small insights are mistakenly interpreted as being more important than they are – from HCP feedback to MSLs or patient comments on social media, for example – time and effort might be wasted on non-issues irrelevant to many individuals.

Actioning insights is important to help organisations make better decisions. But it can also help develop trust with stakeholders, such as patients, payers and HCPs, by demonstrating their input is valued.

“When we organise advisory boards or patient advocacy groups or expert meetings, we come back to them with a report, an action plan as well as the final output”, says Smyk, who points out that stakeholders get frustrated when researchers collect their input but they do not see what solution they helped to create.

## Which three channels/tools best help you share Medical Affairs insights across your organisation?





The patient insights that Smyk's team collects are used to meet unmet patient needs, improve clinical trial design, subsequently helping to accelerate recruitment, improve retention, and understand the safety and relevance of a study. "If we don't collect patient and participant insights, we can completely miss an opportunity to improve or simplify clinical study designs, which could impact not only enrolment due to unnecessary patient burden, but also reduce retention", says Smyk.

To discuss insights on the protocol design process, Smyk strongly recommends involving a wide team, including patients, scientific steering committees and different functions within the organisation. This ensures that the relevant experts deliberate insights and action them accordingly. Discussions include inclusion and exclusion criteria selection, which directly affect enrolment targets and can have a huge impact on clinical trial costs – and importantly, final results.

## Ask the Experts

### **Q. How do you manage insights to make sure that the right insights are informing strategies, are being actioned and getting to the right people?**

A. "Insights are only as good as a team's ability to process and use them to inform and refine strategy. Medical affairs teams that build clear, impactful reports, create or leverage existing cross-functional environments to drill down into insights in depth, and continually refine key scientific insight questions, will have the upper hand in competitive scenarios."

**Michael Kahn, Spark Therapeutics**

A. "If we see a lot of observations or data effects coming in, we might be able to say there's an insight there. But if it's only affecting 2% of the group we want to target, it's probably not worth investing a lot of resources."

**Gurinder Sidhu, Pfizer**

A. "We discuss clinical trial protocols with a wide team: patient advocacy group, scientific steering committee, and different departments within the company. If you don't action those insights, there's a risk to patient retention in clinical trials. We need to be prepared to change strategy to avoid enrolment and retention issues."

**Andrzej Smyk, Merck Group**

A. "Senior leaders attempting to use insights to support their next decision are more likely to action insights that spark questions or reveal connections. "Actioning" an insight is enhanced when it contains a clear description of the implication to the company or the patient, it challenges the current strategy or informs pursuing a new opportunity."

**Victoria Ho, Independent Medical Excellence Consultant**



# THE BOTTOM LINE: DEMONSTRATING IMPACT

The pivotal role Medical Affairs could take in contributing to revenue is gaining recognition. To truly establish itself as a major change driver, however, Medical Affairs need to prove that the insights it provides go on to affect the bottom line.

For this to happen, Medical Affairs must first actively generate and communicate insights on strategy in areas where the financial impact would be more easily measurable. Viable areas include decisions made in R&D pipeline development, clinical trial design to improve enrolment and retention, HCP engagement and education and commercial operations.

Taking clinical trial design as an example, medical insights which help reduce patient burden and accelerate enrolment and improve retention, can be directly linked back to reducing R&D costs. Clinical trial delays are excruciatingly expensive. Eighty-five percent of trials “don’t start on time due to issues with enrolment,” and 30% of participants that do enrol drop out due to poor (non-clinical) experiences, according to Accenture. (7)

Once it is having a notable influence on a strategy, it becomes essential to quantify the subsequent impact on revenue and ensure that this is fed back to other functions. Success in this area will lead to increased demand for future insights from other functions, further expanding the influence of Medical Affairs.

Given the strict regulatory boundaries in which it operates, Medical Affairs tends to err on the side of caution, avoiding any changes perceived as risky. Certain avenues of measuring impact will forever be out of bounds, such as directly linking medical information engagement to changes in physician prescribing behaviour.

Nevertheless, Medical Affairs teams should be willing to take calculated risks. While avoiding undue vulnerability, they should strive to comprehend new capabilities and approaches, derive value from them and then inform long-term decisions. A spirit of innovative iteration and measured risk-taking is vital.

Looking at the commercial sphere, where brand teams are constantly innovating and pushing boundaries, Medical Affairs ought to be doing the same. It should experiment, find what works and then standardise those successful strategies. This proactive approach is the key to transitioning fully from a supportive role to becoming a true strategic partner.



# THE FUTURE OF MEDICAL AFFAIRS INSIGHTS

## THERE WILL BE WINNERS AND LOSERS IN THREE TO FOUR YEARS

The future is laden with opportunities for Medical Affairs if it can find ways to wield data optimally. “The recognition of how important medical insights are and the impact they have on the business is coming to fruition”, says Hill. “In the next three to five years, insights management will mature a great deal, and there will be winners and losers”.

A key part of this future, Hill believes, will be the ability to streamline insights generation by leveraging AI language models, such as ChatGPT, and other bespoke AI tools geared specifically toward life sciences.

## UPTAKE OF AI TO ASSESS MSL DATA WILL INCREASE

Consultant, Ho, sees AI playing a more significant role in how insights are generated from MSLs sooner rather than later, including in ways that involve current manual analysis tools, such as spotting patterns in spreadsheets, a typical format for collating MSL insights.

Advances in AI can't come soon enough for van der Voort, who envisions a future in which humans can focus on more creative activities: “AI will make us much more efficient and effective as humans. We will be able to focus more on activities that only humans can do. But there's still a lot to learn”.

**“BEING ABLE TO SPEED UP THAT MANUAL CHECKING PROCESS AND SPOTTING PATTERNS THAT HUMAN BRAINS AREN'T GREAT AT SPOTTING—SUCH AS WHEN CONFRONTED WITH AN EXCEL SPREADSHEET OF TEXT—AI COULD USE ALGORITHMS AND BE PROGRAMMED TO LOOK FOR THOSE PATTERNS MUCH BETTER.”**

Victoria Ho, Independent Medical Excellence Consultant

## AI WILL GET BETTER AT STREAMLINING INSIGHTS MANAGEMENT ACROSS ALL CHANNELS

Most of the industry experts we spoke to agreed that AI, machine learning and other forms of advanced analytics will revolutionise the speed and ease of turning data into actionable insights, accelerate innovation, improve patient outcomes and benefit the bottom line of businesses that leverage such technologies.

“The future of collecting data and generating insights is automated digital processing”, says Smyk, referring to a wide array of channels, including email, Facebook, Twitter and numerous other digital tools.

Presently, there's an effort to determine the best way to synthesise all this diverse information into a comprehensive package, says Smyk, which could serve as a valuable tool for strategy development. “We believe that using artificial intelligence or machine learning can create automatic tools that will select those insights and inform our strategy”.

## PATIENT INSIGHTS WILL GUIDE DRUG DEVELOPMENT

Patient engagement activities are growing in importance because more engaged patients create a win-win situation of higher diagnosis levels, better patient outcomes and improved adherence to medication.

Leaders in Medical Affairs see the potential to become more proactive and contribute significantly to patient activation and engagement through sharing timely, actionable insights. Some are even anticipating that patients will play a pivotal role in determining the development of future medicines in the upcoming decade. (8)

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# THANKS

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