Patient Empowerment: What does it mean for medical market research?

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In todayâ€™s healthcare environment, patient empowerment is a top concern. Pharmaceutical companies and healthcare providers often tout it, advising patients that they can and should be directly involved in deciding on their treatment options. Even the government is actively encouraging patient choice and working to educate people on how they can select their own GPs, hospitals, consultants, and treatments.
Knowledge is everywhere and people want to be in-the-know. The internet has opened up the floodgates, putting patients directly in contact with medical market research studies, peer-reviewed medical journal articles, diagnostic portals, alternative medicine blogs, drug reviews, and so much more. While this can be a good thing, it can also present challenges for medical professionals.

The GP and the Informed Patient

There was a time when people typically went to a physician to find out what was wrong with them. But todayâ€™s patients are, for better or worse, often more informed. In some ways, this can make a physicianâ€™s job easier because an informed patient may be better able to describe symptoms and be more familiar with concepts and terms that the doctor uses in explaining the problem and the recommended treatment.

However, it can also mean that the patient arrives with false preconceptions about their condition that they may have received from unreliable information sources. Even if they were getting materials from respected sources, the patient could have too quickly read or misunderstood what they were reading. As a result, the physician might find it difficult to persuade the patient to accept a diagnosis or preferred treatment if it runs counter to what the patient learned online.

Another problem that GPs face is having patients come in already determined to get a particular medication that they read about. The physician may feel that it is not the right choice for the patientâ€™s condition, once again putting the doctor in the position of having to defend their professional assessment against that of unknown sources.

What does this mean for Medical Market Research?

Itâ€™s important that medical market researchers be keenly aware of this new dynamic between physicians and patients and that they understand the effect that it has on both of them. For physicians, it can make them feel defensive and frustrated, and it can also be a strain on their time as the patient asks them to consider alternate hypotheses (and sometimes even read printed material that theyâ€™ve brought with them).Â Â

For the patient, it can also be frustrating, especially if they feel the doctor is automatically dismissing their concerns or unwilling to accept new information (some of which could actually be solid peer-reviewed research that the GP is simply unfamiliar with). A patient may also be worried that some of their suggestions for treatment or medication are being turned down not for medical reasons, but because of cost.

Knowing these concerns and sensitivities in the doctor-patient relationship can help those carrying out medical market research, as they seek to communicate with both of these groups and as they try to understand what motivates them, what challenges and problems they face and what the informed patient means for diagnosis and ongoing treatment management. Â

Brave New World

The self-educated patient is here to stay, and credible bodies like the National Health Service can go a long way to helping patients by pointing them in the right direction and assisting them in making the healthcare choices that will work best for them. Everything from â€˜GP shoppingâ€™ online to getting email consultations from doctors are possibilities now with expanded patient choice.

The creation and availability of these patient choice resources is going to transform the way healthcare professionals engage with patients, from diagnosis to treatment to prescriptions. Pharmaceutical companies need to be aware of these rapid changes in the landscape since it will inevitably affect the way they do business. Medical market research is critical to identifying and understanding these changes, so an increased focus on patient research is imperative.

Empowering Everybody

Itâ€™s understood that no one is going to advocate harder on a patientâ€™s behalf than the patient himself. Naturally physician and other medical professionals are dedicated to helping their patients make the right choices, but with an ever-growing

body of medical research out there to be explored, many patients feel that they need to make the effort to educate themselves about their health. Â

At times, the informed patient can present challenges for those working in the healthcare industry, but they can also present opportunities. If the medical establishment works hand in hand with patients, empowering them with resources, tools, and decision-making capabilities, it could be good for everyone. Â

Through their work, medical market researchers will play a key role in discovering what these developments mean to patients and physicians alike, and what it means for the healthcare industry as a whole.Â Â

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