

Examining the triumphs and trials of medical representatives in Thrissur district

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Abstract

Medical representatives face so many issues and problems today in India and globally. There are diverse views in terms of physician actually being respectful to Medical representatives. The doctor's feels that the medical represents are wasting their time. It is just a 'blaming game' and fingers being pointed at each other. Thus the study was an attempt to understand the real professional challenges faced by the Medical representatives. A structured questionnaire was constructed and the required data was gathered from 85 Medical representatives in Thrissur district. The sampling technique adopted for the study was convenience sampling. The data was analysed and the findings of the research were listed out. It was observed that Medical representatives are facing different problems. Among these non-receipt of salary in time and poor product quality are the serious challenge for them. Based on the details of the study it was suggested to concentrate on MRs professional and personal growth by enhancing their job related skills. The details of the study show that the interaction between medical representatives and doctors has to be smoothened.

Keywords: medical representatives, professional challenge, triumphs, trials

Introduction

Medical representatives (MRs) are the fundamental links between the doctor and the pharmaceutical company. They are the pharmaceutical drug company employees' who regularly visit the doctor, and give particulars of company's drug to the doctor and also get feedback for potential operational activities. MRs principally builds relationship with doctors and battles to promote the company's drugs to doctors. Hence, the interface between a MR and a doctor is considered as a vital part of their marketing plan by the pharmaceutical companies.

The study "Examining the triumphs and trials of medical representative's at Thrissur district" simply means to understand the challenges or problems faced by medical representatives. Medical representatives are the prime point of contact between pharmaceutical and medical companies and healthcare professionals, promoting product awareness, answering queries, providing advice and introducing new products. They demonstrate the features and benefit of company's product to the medical professionals as track them to use the product with the ailing subject. Exceptional sales skills are the prerequisite for medical representatives. MR's are basically sales persons and they are involved in indirect selling. Indirect selling is meeting with a professional who persuades the end-user. The major observation is that they shift their positions often skipping from one company to another. The real reason behind the Medical Reps quitting their jobs is out of sheer frustration. The study attempts to examine the true proficient accomplishments and experiments faced by the Medical representatives as they are facing high targets and work pressures to promote their medicines to their mediators and end users.

Objectives of the Study

- To identify the professional achievements and obstacles of medical representatives in Thrissur district.
- To know how the work experience of a medical representatives depends on the prescription behaviour of a doctor.
- To understand whether the interpersonal skills of representatives or the brand name influences the sales of pharmacy products.
- To suggest certain remedial measures to improve the working conditions of sales representatives.

Need and Scope of the Study

This study mainly focused on the challenges or problems of medical representatives. The key challenges in front of them are,

- Regular visits of MR positively impact the prescription made by the doctors.
- Personal detailing is most influential promotional tools but MR quality is dropping
- Brand recall is high, if MR regularly visits the clinic.
- Number of visits / time of visits should be planned as per doctors preferences/schedules
- Quality of content and good communication skills are crucial to engage doctors in MR detailing

These confronting roles of Medical representatives motivated the researcher to concentrate on this area to examine their professional challenges and their achievements.

Statement of the Problem

Medical representatives are the connecting link between the company and medical professional/hospitals. Now a days

being a pharmaceutical sales representative is getting tougher. Sales force expansions, as well as the increased responsibilities of the average rep, have created new professional obstacles and added to ones that have always existed. The day to day challenges of the medical representatives and their withdrawal from this field creates a professional threat and demand for talents. Thus the study aims to examine the tale behind their professional success and failures.

Review of Literature

The review of literature helps us to track the methodology and outcome of previous studies undertaken by the researchers who stood as forerunners in the application of similar topics. Few studies are,

Sandip. B. Patil *et al.* (2013), the study focuses on achieving targets which is resulting into the work induced stress among medical representatives. The result shows that there is significant amount of work induced stress among medical representatives. It is creating many health hazards. Unless work induced stress among medical representatives is recognized and reduced they will remain on the brim of getting many health consequences.

Shaw Judy (2008) [7] in her article entitled "How do they do it-secrets of super reps" has outlined a few ideas on how successful sales representatives manage to do that. A minority of pharmaceutical sales representatives show consistently higher sales than the rest of the field force. In a study, the top representatives were found to be successful not just because of higher call rates or superior product knowledge. Their success could be attributed to their belief, their flexibility and their interpersonal skills, language, behaviour, and skills.

Hradecky (2001) in his article "challenges in pharmaceutical sales" identified many challenges or obstacles existed in the pharmaceutical industry. According to him, being a pharmaceutical sales representative is getting tougher. To convince a physician to switch from a drug that he or she is prescribing to their patient is the true challenge for the pharmaceutical sales representative. Increase in the number of reps in the field, changes in the pharmaceutical industry, sales force turnover, less time in front of doctors, etc. are the other challenges facing by the pharmaceutical sales representatives. They have to create a unique identity among the doctors to exist in industry.

Thus these reviews torches light for an attempt and progress of the present study

Research Methodology

Research in common parlance refers to a search for knowledge. The research design used in the study is descriptive by nature. The total numbers of medical representative in Thrissur district are approximately 1200. The total number of samples considered for the study is 85. Keeping in view the problem and the need for the study, the researcher attempts to observe and understand the challenges or problems faced by the MR's in Thrissur district. The sampling design used for this study was convenience sampling. The primary data was collected through structured questionnaire. The review and verification of many previous researches conducted on the topic resulted in preparing a

structured questionnaire. The questionnaire developed by the researcher was reviewed on basis of results obtained through pilot study which was collected from 15 respondents and necessary modification was encompassed to streamline with the need of the study. The reliability co-efficient of the instruments administered in this study were determined by Cronbach's Alpha method.

Cronbach's Alpha	No of Items
.723	17

The reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.723. Hence the questionnaire fits itself as reliable and structured questionnaire. The relevant statistical tool was compatibly used to test the hypothesis and the results were interpreted. Thus descriptive and inferential statistics were computed with SPSS Package Version 17.

Limitations

The study concentrates only on professional challenges, but other related factors like Psychological and social factors are not considered. The trust and reliability of the results depends on the factual information's shared by the respondents.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Personal Attributes of the respondents

PA	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	76	89.4
Female	9	10.6
Age		
20-30 years	41	48.2
30-40 years	31	36.5
40-50 years	13	15.3
Qualification		
UG	71	83.5
PG	13	15.3
D.Pharm	1	1.2
Specialisation		
Pharmacy	2	2.4
Science	29	34.1
Arts	54	63.5
Nature of company		
MNC	20	23.5
National	59	69.4
Domestic	6	7.1
work experience		
Below 4 years	20	23.5
4-8 years	28	32.9
More than 8 years	37	43.5

The table depicts that 89.4% of the respondents are male and 10.6% of them are female. It was observed that the study sample was dominated by male. 48.2% of the respondents are classified under the age group of 20-30 years. It was found that 83.5% of the respondents are Under Graduates and 63.5% of Medical Representatives included in the study have been specialised science and arts respectively. It portrays that 43.5% of them possess more than 8 years of job experience.

Table 2: Personal Selling Methods

S. No	Personal Selling Method	HE		E		M		NE		NAE	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Regularity in visits	69	81.2	16	18.8	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	Personal gifts	8	9.4	51	60.0	21	24.7	2	2.4	3	3.5
3	Effective presentation	54	63.5	28	32.9	3	3.5	0	0	0	0
4	Providing free samples	9	10.6	56	65.9	16	18.8	4	4.7	0	0
5	Attractive packaging	32	37.6	40	47.1	9	10.6	2	2.4	2	2.4
6	Having company's own website	11	12.9	29	34.1	39	45.9	3	3.5	3	3.5
7	Good will of the company	47	55.3	32	37.6	5	5.9	0	0	1	1.2
8	Product specific campaign	15	17.6	43	50.6	25	29.4	1	1.2	1	1.2
9	Advanced technology in formulation	30	35.3	44	51.8	10	11.8	1	1.2	0	0
10	Right product focus	33	38.8	44	51.8	8	9.4	0	0	0	0
11	Providing offers	39	45.9	27	31.8	11	12.9	2	2.4	6	7.1
12	Sponsoring seminars	7	8.2	36	42.4	32	37.6	7	8.2	3	3.5
13	Continuing Medical Educations	18	21.2	36	42.4	25	29.4	5	5.9	1	1.2
14	Patient benefit factors	18	21.2	42	49.4	21	24.7	3	3.5	1	1.2
15	Economic price	61	71.8	14	16.5	7	8.2	1	1.2	2	2.4
16	Subscribing magazines	5	5.9	25	29.4	39	45.9	11	12.9	5	5.9
17	Subscribing medical journals	8	9.4	25	29.4	40	47.1	9	10.6	3	3.5

Note: HE- Highly Effective, E- Effective, M-Moderate, NE- Not Effective, NAE- Not At all Effective

On the basis of the response from medical representatives, 81.2% of them opined that regularity in visits is considered as the highly effective method for personal selling. 71.8% of medical representatives felt that economic price of medicines are highly effective factor that favours personal selling method. 60% of MRs responded that a personal gift provided

by the company for the doctors is an effective method. 63.5% of MRs stated that effective presentation highly contributes to personal selling. Thus 17 elements contributing to personal selling are rated differently by the respondents using 5 point rating scale ranging from highly effective to not at all effective.

Table 3: Customer relationship marketing practices

Sl. No.	Customer Relationship Marketing Practice	HI		I		M		NI		NAI	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Very frequent visits	68	80.0	17	20.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2.	Greeting on birthdays	8	9.4	40	47.1	28	32.9	6	7.1	3	3.5
3.	Sponsoring professional interests	12	14.1	35	41.2	30	35.3	7	8.2	1	1.2
4.	Sponsoring personal vacations	12	14.1	29	34.1	33	38.8	7	8.2	4	4.7
5.	Giving expensive personal gifts	10	11.8	46	54.1	20	23.5	5	5.9	4	4.7
6.	Arranging lunch/dinner	12	14.1	39	45.9	19	22.4	10	11.8	5	5.9
7.	Subscribing journals/magazines	9	10.6	17	20.0	45	52.9	12	14.1	2	2.4
8.	Arranging family get-togethers	12	14.1	16	18.8	35	41.2	12	14.1	10	11.8

***Note:** HI- Highly Influential, I-Influential, M-Moderate, I-Not Influential, NAI- Not At all Influential

According to the opinion of medical representatives (80%), very frequent visit is the highly influential marketing practice for managing customer relationship. 47.1% of the respondents

stated that greeting on their birthdays is an influential factor for managing good customer relationship.

Table 4: Brand Reminder

Sl. No.	Brand Reminder	HE		E		M		NE		NAE	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Short product name	59	69.4	21	24.7	2	2.4	1	1.2	2	2.4
2.	Company name combined product name	55	64.7	20	23.5	5	5.9	3	3.5	2	2.4
3.	Molecule related product name	56	65.9	26	30.6	2	2.4	0	0	1	1.2
4.	Constant reminders	32	37.6	45	52.9	7	8.2	0	0	1	1.2
5.	Pamphlets	10	11.8	26	30.6	26	30.6	0	0	2	2.4
6.	More free samples	17	20.0	46	54.1	17	20.0	4	4.7	1	1.2
7.	Easy pronunciation of the drug	48	56.5	31	36.5	5	5.9	0	0	1	1.2
8.	Product specific campaign	16	18.8	49	57.6	19	22.4	0	0	1	1.2
9.	Providing extra offers/benefits	21	24.7	42	49.4	13	15.3	5	5.9	4	4.7
10.	Effective launch of a new brand	16	18.8	46	54.1	18	21.2	2	2.4	3	3.5
11.	Gifts with super scribed brand name	46	54.1	46	54.1	22	25.9	5	5.9	1	1.2
12.	Daily reminders	21	24.7	31	36.5	28	32.9	4	4.7	1	1.2

According to the opinion of Medical Representatives, 69.4% of them responded that short product name is highly effective for them to create more sales and a unique identity. Company name combined with product name is also stated to be highly

effective by 64.7% of the respondents. 65.9% of them felt that the molecule related product name is highly effective for brand remainder.

Table 5: Problems of MR

Sl. No	Problems of MR	HS		SS		MM		NSNS		NAS	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Non receipt of continuous promotional inputs	29	34.1	44	51.8	6	7.1	4	4.7	2	2.4
2	Company not providing offers to support promotion	27	31.8	43	50.6	7	8.2	6	7.1	2	2.4
3	Target achievement	31	36.5	46	54.1	5	5.9	3	3.5	0	0
4	Difficulty in getting appointments	10	11.8	24	28.2	46	54.1	4	4.7	1	1.2
5	Long waiting time at the doctor's place	17	20.0	39	45.9	20	23.5	8	9.4	1	1.2
6	High expectations from the doctors	10	11.8	30	35.3	36	42.4	9	10.6	0	0
7	Frequent brand shifting	38	44.7	31	36.5	7	8.2	8	9.4	1	1.2
8	Improper incentives	45	52.9	25	29.4	9	10.6	2	2.4	4	4.7
9	Non receipt of salary in time	54	63.5	16	18.8	4	4.7	5	5.9	6	7.1
10	Poor product quality	53	62.4	19	22.4	4	4.7	4	4.7	5	5.9
11	Product non-availability	48	56.5	30	35.3	2	2.4	1	1.2	4	4.7
12	Job-insecurity	30	35.3	36	42.4	15	17.6	2	2.4	2	2.4
13	High competition	21	24.7	45	52.9	17	20.0	1	1.2	1	1.2
14	Limited coverage of the distributors	18	21.2	54	63.5	7	8.2	4	4.7	2	2.4
15	Non receipt of payment by the distributor	23	27.1	44	51.8	4	4.7	8	9.4	6	7.1
16	Improper stock maintenance by the distributor	21	24.7	46	54.1	5	5.9	8	9.4	5	5.9

* Note-HS-Highly Serious, S-Serious, M-Moderate, NS- Not Serious, NAS-Not At All Serious

This table highlights the different problems faced by medical representatives. On the basis of the opinions of MRs, non receipt of salary in time (63.5%) and poor product quality (62.4%) are considered as major problems. 63.5% of the respondents stated that limited coverage of the distributors as a serious problem. Product non-availability (56.5%) and improper incentives (52.9%) are also highly serious problems

for MR's. Similarly they have rated 16 different problems related to their professional challenges.

H0 = There is no significant difference among Age and Professional challenges of MR's.

H1 = There is significant difference among Age and Professional challenges of MR's.

Table 6: Age Vs Professional Challenges of Medical Representatives

Professional Problems	Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Difficulty in getting appointments	20-30 years	41	3.73	.949	.148
	30-40 years	31	3.16	.523	.094
	40-50 years	13	3.23	.599	.166
	Total	85	3.45	.809	.088
Long waiting time at doctor's place	20-30 years	41	3.83	.972	.152
	30-40 years	31	3.87	.846	.152
	40-50 years	13	3.15	.801	.222
	Total	85	3.74	.928	.101
High expectations from doctors	20-30 years	41	3.66	.883	.138
	30-40 years	31	3.45	.675	.121
	40-50 years	13	3.00	.913	.253
	Total	85	3.48	.840	.091
High competition	20-30 years	41	4.17	.892	.139
	30-40 years	31	3.90	.597	.107
	40-50 years	13	3.62	.650	.180
	Total	85	3.99	.779	.085

ANOVA						
Professional problems		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Difficulty in getting appointments	Between Groups	6.462	2	3.231	5.457	.006
	Within Groups	48.550	82	.592		
	Total	55.012	84			

Long waiting time at doctor's place	Between Groups	5.325	2	2.662	3.259	.043
	Within Groups	66.981	82	.817		
	Total	72.306	84			
High expectations from doctors	Between Groups	4.327	2	2.163	3.231	.045
	Within Groups	54.897	82	.669		
	Total	59.224	84			
High competition	Between Groups	3.397	2	1.698	2.926	.059
	Within Groups	47.591	82	.580		
	Total	50.988	84			

The calculated value is greater than the table value; hence the null hypothesis is rejected. Here there is a significant difference among age group and the Professional challenges of MR's. Therefore the age factor influences certain professional challenges of Medical representatives like getting appointments to meet the doctors, long waiting time at doctor's place, high expectation from doctors, high competition

Table 7: Mean Score of Attributes contributing to Brand Remainder

S. No	Brand Reminder	Mean	Rank
1	short product name	4.57	2
2	company name combined product name	4.45	4
3	molecule related product name	4.60	1
4	constant reminders	4.26	5
5	pamphlets	3.76	11
6	more free samples	3.87	7
7	easy pronunciation of drug	4.47	3
8	product specific campaign	3.94	6
9	providing extra offers	3.84	8
10	effective launch of new brand	3.82	9
11	gift with super scribed brand name	3.72	12
12	daily reminders	3.79	10

The mean scores for the elements contributing to the brand remainder was calculated and it was observed that Molecule related product name stood first with highest mean score of 4.60. Short product name was ranked second in order with 4.57 mean score. Easy pronunciation of drug stood third in the priority list with 4.47 mean score. Thus each attributes grabs its own priority to add brand remainder among the mediator and end users.

Findings

The study lends hands to the researcher to highlight the following findings related to the topic,

- The study shows that the sample included for research is dominant by male respondents as 89.4% of MR's are male.
- The observation shows that 48.2% of MR's are classified under the age group ranging from 20-30 years.
- 83.5% of the respondents are qualified with under graduate degree. Only 2.4% respondents are specialised in pharmacy.
- Based on the nature of the company, it was found that 69.4% of the respondents were working under National based companies.
- 43.5% of MRs holds more than 8 years of work experience.
- It was clear from the analysis that 70.6% of MRs has previous sales experience.

- Regularity in visits and economic price of the medicines are the effective methods for personal selling.
- Very frequent visit is the highly influential marketing practice for customer relationship.
- 69.4% of the respondents opined that short product name contributes to brand reminder.
- MRs are facing different problems. Among these non-receipt of salary in time and poor product quality are the serious challenge for them.
- There is a significant difference among age group and the Professional challenges of MR's and hence the null hypothesis was rejected.
- The mean scores for the elements contributing to the brand remainder was calculated and it was observed that Molecule related product name stood first with highest mean score of 4.60.

Suggestions

Medical representatives are the key link between pharmaceutical or medical equipment companies and healthcare professionals. They are responsible for building a network with healthcare professionals to promote product awareness, answer queries regarding usage of products, provide advice and help introduce new products. Hence they should concentrate on their professional and personal growth by enhancing their job related skills.

Conclusion

Every pharmaceutical company's medical representatives are loaded with a lot of information which is not appreciated by doctors. Thus the interaction between medical representatives and doctors has drastically come down. In this context, without good relationship, pharmaceutical companies may not able to achieve their goals as well as good products may not reach human beings. Thus the study anticipates a scenario change in the professional life style of the medical representatives and their relationship with the mediators and end users to support the growth of pharmaceutical industries.

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