

The Science of Meetings

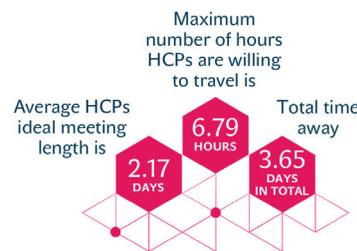
A LOOK AT MAJOR AGENCY RESEARCH ON PHYSICIANS' PERSPECTIVES ON SCIENTIFIC MEETINGS, HOW THESE MEETINGS ARE CHANGING, AND FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR PHARMA COMPANIES

Ninety-five per cent of healthcare professionals (HCPs) expect scientific meetings to be engaging and impactful, yet only 40% claimed meetings they regularly attend deliver a positive experience. The findings came out of a study by international provider of outsourcing solutions to the pharmaceutical industry, Ashfield.

The findings led Ashfield to launch a new approach, *Science of Meetings*, designed to identify HCPs' educational needs, addressing them through tailored healthcare meetings programmes.

Gerry Montgomery, business director for Ashfield Meetings & Events, said the data from the study and regular interactions with experts and prescribers helped better understand HCPs "allowing us to develop personalised learning journeys for each audience".

So what were the findings? As part of their overall learning journey, healthcare professionals (HCPs) attend 'scientific meetings' to expand their knowledge, connect with peers, listen to



thought leaders and discuss advances in treatment. Surveys consistently reveal that scientific meetings feature in the top three preferred channels for HCP medical education. But will it always be the case?

With changes in legislation and shifts in technology that facilitate remote learning, will HCPs continue to travel halfway around the globe for a scientific meeting, ad board or standalone, taking days away from their practice? Or will they become increasingly selective, looking for alternative medical education channels and only attending in person those meetings known to deliver a return on their investment of time and money?

These questions point to trends which

look set to continue in future.

The research aimed to find out what drives HCPs to attend scientific meetings, what criteria they use in evaluating them, and how they see the scientific meetings of the future evolving.

The research revealed HCPs' main motivations for attending scientific meetings were around connecting with peers, idea exchange and hearing the latest developments in their field delivered by global thought leaders. However, nearly 40% of those interviewed had not had a positive delegate experience at the meetings they have attended.

The Ashfield research attempted to address ways in which experiences could be improved. It also investigated the barriers to attendance and other logistical challenges HCPs face, including changes in legislation (eg EFPIA Code Open Payments in the USA) and managing workloads when physicians are away from their practices.

The message came back that, as constraints upon HCPs grow, the impact and value of an event must grow accordingly, to warrant their attendance.

The research reminded that HCPs are consumers and will respond in a similar way to experiences that are well thought-out, designed and delivered, take into account their motivations and make an emotional connection.

Other findings included the expectations HCPs have around shaping

Below: HCPs' referred channels for learning (scale of 1-10, where 1 = 'strongly preferred')

Professional journals and publications	2.63	
Attendance at scientific congress or meeting	2.65	✓
CME	3.75	
References and textbooks	3.81	
Professional society website	4.42	
Peer-to-peer networks at hospital/practice	4.80	

MOST PREFERRED
LEAST PREFERRED

Type of meetings attended over the last 12 months



event agendas, technology platforms, distances travelled and time expended on meetings.

The first finding was that 75% of those surveyed were keen to have greater input.

Delegates' ideal meeting length is around two days, with just a day of travel in total (ie half-a-day either side of the meeting) – meaning that overall they prefer to be away from their practice for no more than three days.

They see developments towards customer-centricity, which harness technology to provide seamless experiences across touchpoints, as being the way forward for meetings.

The Future of Healthcare Meetings forum held subsequent to the primary research added an extra perspective to

the data gathered from leading pharma event stakeholders, including procurement, brand marketeers, compliance and event stakeholders.

Key topics included the following:

- Internal collaboration: Greater alignment of goals between marketing and medical affairs will assist in delivering seamless delegate experiences
- Patient empowerment: HCPs are conscious of the greater information at patients' disposal and welcome the idea of patients having a voice at meetings for they attend
- Meeting length: The trend is towards shorter meetings, with HCPs preferring a length of two days, including travel

Towards a holistic solution

Thinking of the overall delegate experience, real impact can be delivered by seamlessly connecting all touchpoints,

pre-, peri- and post-event.

Looking to the future, the overwhelming view from the research is that meetings in 10 years will be increasingly virtual and interactive. The statistic on the graph (left) shows that 49% of repondees had attended a virtual meeting in the last 12 months. There is clearly an interconnectivity of the physical and virtual, with the question now of how we find innovative solutions that bring the two together where it is suitable to extend the reach of the event to a wider audience.

So what can pharma start doing right now to improve the meetings experience?

The methodology diagram below, the researchers claim, incorporates all the findings into a workable formula:

For meetings to continue to add value for HCPs and pharma alike, new approaches are needed: ones which leverage technology, construct seamless experiences, and provide opportunities to contribute and create emotional impact. ■

The Ashfield research was a global study with interviews conducted in 11 countries across the Americas, Asia and Europe. Respondents represented a broad range of HCP specialties and a spread of experience. To be selected for interview, every HCP had attended at least one scientific meeting within the last 12 months.

Data + insight + personalisation + experts + planning + storytelling = impact

