

Target doctors for sales

10 September 2009 | News



Target doctors for sales

-Sandeep Saxena, CEO and founder, Acton Biologicals, Pune.

No diagnostics laboratory has a sales team focused on therapeutic segment. Hence they don't have any relationships with doctors, their actual customers. The sales team of diagnostics laboratories have been meeting pathologists, telling them that we also do these tests, why don't you outsource your tests to us. Doctors shy away from prescribing diagnostics tests and sales are stunted.

There are lots of tests available in the Indian market, and the doctor knows about the utility of the test, but is not prescribing that because there is a communication gap between the company offering it and the diagnostics lab. The doctor does not have answers to simple questions such as, what is the sample needed, when will he get the report, what is the cost, and where should the patient go to drop his sample. These questions are unanswered, because medical representatives from diagnostics laboratory have not visited this doctor for many years now. You cannot blame the medical representative for this as his mandate is to generate business. It's more effective and easy to achieve a sales target by meeting pathologists. The five large diagnostics companies employ close to 100 people each. It's also impossible for these 500 medical representatives to cover all the seven lakh doctors in India.

There are so many developments happening globally in biochemistry, radioimmune assay, microbiology, blood tests and genetics. But pathology labs in India are not able to bring the advancements into Indian clinical practice as the communication channel is missing. It is either left to the practicing doctors to read on their own, or the equipment manufacturers, technology distributors and kit manufacturers to push their products to the markets.

Most medium to large diagnostics laboratories have a test menu of 1,000–5,000 tests. Each test is needed by different therapeutic segment for a different reason. In the brief training that a diagnostic company gives to its medical representatives, it is impossible to understand all applications, significance, method of test and sample needed for all the tests.

While on the other hand, pharmaceutical companies usually have 100 member strong sales teams focused on single therapeutic segments. Diagnostics companies should follow the pharmaceutical model of sales focusing on specific therapeutic segments. Pharmaceutical companies spend close to 20 percent of their revenue into sales and marketing activities as compared to five percent or less invested by diagnostics companies.

The medical representative needs to be trained in the segment, needs a printed test menu for that therapeutic segment and has to gradually build a relationship with the doctors in that particular segment. He would be able to give meaningful information on various tests, availability of test, sample pickup, turn around time, method used for testing and cost. There will be lots of suggestions in terms of new tests needed, bundling of tests and research projects that will come from practicing doctors. If implemented quickly, the diagnostics laboratory can charge a premium. With this premium coming in, diagnostics laboratories can organize city wide doctor meets, regional CMEs and annual national conferences. With these efforts, doctors will be more confident about why a particular test is essential before a treatment can be selected.

It's easier said than done. The kind of investment that is needed to implement this suggestion is gigantic. But we can start small. Let's say one small town and one large therapeutic category. It can be Pune and cardiovascular disorders. There will be close to 100 doctors in Pune treating cardiac patients. These doctors will have specific requirements in terms of diagnostics tests. To build a relationship with all of them, the team needs training, hand holding, communication material, regular scientific updation and a lot of patience.

But once the motion is set, sky is the limit. This exercise will generate a lot of revenue, learning, database of doctors and confidence in the sales team. This could be replicated across India for cardiovascular disorders. Second time onwards, it will be faster and effective. Next step is to conquer other specialities one by one.