



Medical Affairs in Dentistry: A Review on Current Perspectives and Future Directions

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ABSTRACT: Medical Affairs (MA) plays a pivotal role in bridging scientific knowledge, regulatory compliance, and healthcare communication within the pharmaceutical industry. Globally, the role of MA has expanded from supporting promotional activities to driving evidence generation, stakeholder engagement, and patient-centric healthcare strategies. In India, the responsibilities of medical advisors have expanded significantly, especially in dentistry, supporting dental research, product development, and patient engagement. In India, where over 600 million individuals are affected by oral conditions, barriers such as cost, access, and misconceptions hinder the care delivery. The growing reliance on over-the-counter dental products, coupled with rapid market expansion, underscores the need for evidence-informed regulation and patient education. Real-world evidence studies, systematic reviews, and continuing dental education programs are reshaping clinical practice, while digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, 3D printing, and electronic health records enhance treatment planning and outcomes. This review outlines the role of medical affairs in reshaping dentistry, enabling integration of scientific rigor with practical care delivery.

KEYWORDS: Dentistry, Medical Affairs, Oral Health, Pharmaceutical Industry, Evidence-Based Dentistry

I. INTRODUCTION

The medical affairs (MA) function as a key source of scientific knowledge in a pharmaceutical company. Initially, the MA department was responsible for offering scientific assistance by sharing medical information with healthcare professionals (HCPs). On the commercial side, MA contributed by evaluating and approving promotional content and materials to ensure they were aligned with the evidence, guidelines, and regulations. Their other duties included training sales teams to enhance their understanding of products

and therapeutic areas, creating educational content, assisting with clinical trials, and supporting studies initiated by investigators[1]. Globally, the pharmaceutical sector is growing, and India's role as a pharmaceutical manufacturer is increasing in significance. With changes in marketing regulations and policies, the responsibilities of a medical advisor in India's pharmaceutical sector have broadened to address inquiries from healthcare practitioners and patients about products, as well as conducting registration clinical trials for new product launches[2].

Due to COVID-19, the Indian medical affairs sector faced numerous challenges. The changes led to an increase in virtual engagements, along with a requirement for additional information beyond brands. New means were adopted to improve customer engagement by enhancing customer connection. Most activities shifted to virtual platforms to facilitate the smooth dissemination of information. There was a strategic shift observed in scientific content generation from a brand-focused approach to highlighting COVID-19 and its association with comorbidities, diseases, and areas of expertise for healthcare professionals[1].

Among the non-communicable diseases, oral health conditions are often neglected. Oral diseases have frequently been named as a "silent epidemic" due to their prevalence globally. This is because these diseases are the most overlooked and unacknowledged group of diseases. Dental issues stem from various obstacles, including a lack of knowledge about oral hygiene and care, underutilization of available facilities in urban settings, limited access to dental services in rural areas, high treatment costs, apathy, and misconceptions about dental care. The dentistry field is challenging as it must keep pace with advancing technology and should adopt those that align with patient compliance to address their health conditions[3].



Global health organizations, such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the World Health Organization (WHO), have established goals to enhance oral health by the year 2030, with several initiatives already in progress to promote awareness, expand access to care, and incorporate oral health into broader health priorities. In India, the Indian Dental Association and other dental associations have also made efforts to meet public needs. Nevertheless, the existing infrastructure and workforce in primary healthcare services are inadequate for providing thorough oral care[4].

II. HEALTHCARE COMMUNICATION IN INDIA

In India, medical information has been well documented since ancient times. Classic medical documentation works include *Atharva Veda*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Charaka Samhita*. Now, in the modern world, medical writing involves the documentation of scientific biomedical information which targets specific audience groups. Overall, it involves creating documents in pharmaceutical domains, including research and development, publication writing (such as journal articles or manuscripts), regulatory writing, and approvals. These resources help healthcare professionals stay up to date with new medical concepts and developments. It also aids in the creation of promotional material for medical education[5].

Pharmaceutical companies face certain challenges in emerging markets. These include diversity in different population groups and regional differences in health policies by the government. Additionally, medical infrastructure, technical and insurance disparities, and lack of updated knowledge of disease profile and other information among the local staff have also contributed to some challenges. Pharmaceutical firms are seeking methods to lower their marketing costs. An effective strategy is to establish a central hub (a 'centre of excellence') for medical communications that creates a repository of shared materials for all products and distributes these resources across various markets, allowing for customization to meet local marketing requirements, such as translation[6].

Regulatory Affairs also forms a crucial section of the pharmaceutical industry. The goal of regulatory affairs is to create a consistent and efficient balance between agency responsiveness to customer requirements and voluntary and regulatory compliance. To determine compliance to regulatory

policy, it assesses and organizes all suggested legal measures[7].

Role Of Medical Advisors

In pharmaceutical companies, medical advisors form an integral part of their projects. Their role has been constantly changing in the landscape of the pharmaceutical industry. In recent years, due to the introduction of stricter regulations for pharmaceutical marketing in India, like the notification issued by the Medical Council of India in 2009, the importance of the medical advisor has grown within the Medical Affairs domain. The medical advisor now serves as an essential link between the pharmaceutical industry and external stakeholders. Roles of a medical advisor include providing accurate medical information and imparting training to sales representatives and the medical team. They also collate scientific information specific to a new product. Material for promotion and creation of scientific literature is reviewed by them, which includes evaluating the content for the same according to appropriate guidelines in India. Offering scientific backing for displays at regional or national conferences is also one of their vital roles[2].

Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), according to Pharma Marketing Network, are doctors or non-physician scientists who are hired by pharmaceutical corporations to serve as consultants and to influence doctors' medical practices, including their prescription behaviour[8]. A Regional Medical Advisor (RMA) or a Medical Science Liaison (MSL) is an executive who mainly operates in the field and primarily focuses on building collaborative relationships with KOLs by delivering medical and scientific support, which helps in a smooth exchange of unbiased scientific information between the company and the medical community. Additionally, they assist sales and marketing teams in identifying business opportunities and play a role in advancing the company's strategic goals[9]. To keep educating the physicians and giving the patients the most recent, evidence-based care, continuing medical education (CME) programs are conducted[10]. Medical advisors also play a crucial role in carrying out such programs. Along with this, a General Manager (GM) can also support the evolving role of MA, encouraging lateral moves for a broader enterprise mindset, and imparting a culture of shared governance roles across functions to foster innovative thinking and nurture future executives in the pharmaceutical industry[11].



III. OVERVIEW OF THE DENTAL INDUSTRY

The global dental services market value rose from USD 471.19 billion in 2022 to USD 507.75 billion in 2023, indicating a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.8% in a year. It is projected to attain USD 656.66 billion by 2027, growing at a CAGR of 6.6%, and may exceed the USD 700 billion threshold by 2030. The dental care market in India, a significant segment of the Asia-Pacific market, has a valuation of USD 653 million and is projected to expand at a CAGR of 9.40%, reaching USD 1.34 billion by 2030. In 2023, the global market for dental hygiene devices was valued at approximately USD 6.5 billion and is expected to grow to USD 9.6 billion by 2032, reflecting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.5% [3].

Around 3.69 billion people are impacted by oral health issues according to the Global Burden of Disease estimates (GBD, 2021). Between 1990 and 2021, this has caused around 276 disease-adjusted life years (DALYs) per 100,000 population. The most significant number of prevalent cases and DALYs are from Southeast Asia. Dental health is a major concern in India as it impacts 632 million individuals. However, the utilization of professional dental services is surprisingly low among the Indian population. A meta-analysis of studies published from 2011 to 2022 revealed that merely 23.96% of people in India accessed dental care services. Additionally, there is a general notion among people that until they do not experience pain that is unbearable, they keep postponing their dental visits. Avoiding preventive care and delaying dental treatments often leads to major complications affecting the lifestyle of an individual [12].

A study was conducted using the data from the Oral Health Observatory (OHO) project (2016–2020). Along with this, a systematic review of secondary literature was done. According to the study results, participants belonging to the age group 18–24 years displayed the highest (51.5%) prevalence of oral health checkups. The older age group above 75 years indicated the lowest prevalence (22.2%), as the prevalence started reducing with age. The frequency of patient-dentist discussions about periodontal conditions increased with age till the 55–64 years age group. After the age of 35–44 years, it was observed that routine oral health check-ups had decreased. The emergency visits between the age group 25–64 years remained steady. A notable percentage of individuals aged 24–35 years (20%), 55–64 years (14%), and 65–74 years (17%) indicated that they thought there was nothing

wrong with their teeth, even though they faced oral health problems [4].

According to the 68th Annual Report of All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi (2023–2024), approximately 45,48,702 patients visited the Outpatient departments, including casualty. On the other hand, 2,45,795 patients visited the Centre for Dental Education and Research facility [13].

Pharmaceutical Aspects of Dentistry

In the last few years, there has been a rise in recognition of dental products among consumers owing to

the fact that the broadcast or marketing of these products has become better over time. Several dental conditions can be prevented and avoided by using commercially available products. The equipment or resources needed to make them depend on product to product. Over the years, the over-the-counter (OTC) medicines in dentistry have also increased. They are easily acquired at a low cost and are often easier to obtain, especially for people who find dental treatment unaffordable or the people who hesitate to visit a dentist. A plethora of dental products exists in the market today, such as products to manage dental caries and decay, staining of teeth, hypersensitivity, periodontal conditions, and so on. Choosing the right OTC product is a task, as incorrect use can lead to several side effects. Hence, it is imperative that a proper discussion on these products be done. A cross-sectional, questionnaire-based, observational study was conducted by Vaid et al., which aimed to understand the perception of oral physicians about the non-prescription dental products. The results of the study showed that the dentists do not favour a particular brand of toothpaste. Most of them believed that knowing the right brushing technique is sufficient and more important. 64.7% of the dentists felt that dental OTC products are used more than required and are causing various adverse effects. Around 94% of the oral physicians feel that there should be strict rules made for controlling unscientific advertising of non-prescription dental products. The launch of new dental products should be evidence-based, comprehensively researched, and backed by relevant scientific studies that are ethical, unbiased, and properly regulated. When suitable, new products should be compared with the existing ones that are currently utilized by the public [14].

Healthcare companies frequently launch novel products, resulting in stiff competition in the marketplace. It is imperative to understand the



demand potential of a particular product. It becomes extremely important for the healthcare companies to understand the existing market potential. Several factors should be kept in mind to assess the market, such as customer needs and preferences, current opportunities, sales strategy designing, and recognising new customer segments. By utilizing marketing's four Ps and competitors' pricing techniques, companies can establish themselves in the market and thrive for an extended period. The Indian dental market is growing with time and is dynamic in nature. Several multinational companies are selling their products. Companies like 3M, Dentsply, and M-Tech Innovation, etc., have their clinical research team in India, which makes them strong competitors. They keep upgrading their products, which is essential to thrive in the marketplace. The majority of the dental market in India is private. Multinational firms have also established a chain of dental clinics like Fortis Healthcare, Apollo Group, and Wockhardt. Approximately annually, around 12,000 to 15,000 new practices begin, which generate new job opportunities as well. For patient outreach and education, the Indian government has also launched several initiatives, like the National Oral Health Program. This has led to the provision of oral health services and facilities along with collaboration with relevant sectors. The Indian Dental Association also has its oral and dental health care compensation program[15].

A study was conducted by Zaware et al. to understand the dental material market potential. It was also

done to get an idea of the perception of the oral physicians towards the Indian dental material brands. The results showed that composite material has the highest market potential, followed by bonding material and etching material. Dentists give more priority to material rather than price, brand, or availability. After the material feature, brand and price are also considered equally, followed by availability, which is the least preferred parameter. Therefore, the dental marketers should focus on giving an appropriate dental product demonstration. They should also give proper technical information to the dentists. This will help in the apt promotion of the dental material, which will contribute to raising the dental material market share. The product companies can utilise different promotion channels like social media, dental magazine advertisements, dental symposiums, conferences, seminars, and workshops. Constant feedback about the dental product should be taken by the companies. Market research should be

performed on a timely basis to develop an effective marketing strategy for a product. These techniques can help companies sustain themselves for a long period in the dental market[15].

Real World Evidence Studies in Dentistry

In the past two decades, 'Real-world evidence' has been a continuation of the shift towards evidence-based dentistry. This acts as a bridge between clinical investigations and their application in dental practice. Data from disease registries, medical records, and clinical databases, including those from pharmacies, hospitals, healthcare agencies, pharmaceutical companies, and medical device manufacturers, can be integrated to improve dental care. Data can also be taken from insurance company databases. These sources help in generating population-based data. Clinical data management through electronic medical records has allowed a very swift progression in the field of evidence-based approaches. Patients are also now well informed about their treatment plan and disease prognosis. Evidence-based dentistry for a dental practitioner means correlating the outcome or treatment to their own clinical practice. This becomes easy if the evidence comes from credible data sources and the real-world approach allows outcomes to be analysed in a real-world setting[16].

A standardised in-line clinical case series brings out a new concept to approach patient care and clinical

investigation. It has several advantages for patients, clinicians, and the dental surgical community. Through this approach, patients can be treated efficiently. This can be done in a standardised manner utilising advanced techniques. This concept enables clinicians to recognise patients who have the same indications, helping them to treat all those patients quickly and consistently under controlled conditions. A quick preparation of manuscripts that outline the procedure details, workflows, or any deviations faced can be done using the standardised documentation approach. Any new surgical technique can be smoothly documented in a precise manner. This can be published, which will be fruitful for the dental surgical community. Once the techniques are made public through various media platforms, clinicians can gain more exposure. Hence, the spread of a new technique can thus occur quickly while still being evidence-based, as it is backed by thorough, systematic documentation and follow-up[16].



IV. DISCUSSION

The functions of the medical affairs (MA) teams include providing scientific support, training the sales teams, reviewing promotional content, looking after the phase IV clinical trials, and investigator-initiated trials. The future medical affairs teams will broadly lead the Internal and External Stakeholders partnerships, focusing on patient-centric healthcare. They will collaborate and build a network with pharmacists, physicians, diagnostic centres, insurance companies, technology-driven organizations, entrepreneurs, and the general community. This will create a sustainable healthcare ecosystem. In the digital age, the MA team can utilise data analytics and artificial intelligence. They can build cloud-based platforms to improve data storage and collection. The team can implement a strategy to increase benefits to patients and physicians, making things cost-effective and demonstrating the economic value of plans such as re-imbursalment options[17]. We expect that future effective Medical Affairs (MA) teams will gain advantages by expanding their partnerships with external stakeholders such as patient organizations, healthcare providers, payers, and legislators, engaging in data-informed discussions to shape the evolution of sustainable healthcare solutions collaboratively. The knowledge and value derived from these external partnerships will be integrated into the company's value chain, including Research and Development, Marketing, and Regulatory Affairs, to ensure the successful and sustainable development, testing, and launch of drugs and therapies[18].

Publication of articles and conducting systematic reviews are extremely important. They play the role of a guide in clinical research. For dentistry, this is necessary because dental devices and materials keep changing and upgrading as the previous ones become obsolete. These provide insights that are extremely crucial for clinical decision-making[19].

Public health surveillance can identify both abrupt and prolonged shifts in disease frequency, trends, and patterns. Pre-market approvals for devices are required; however Food and Drug Administration (FDA) keeps scrutinizing the product even after its release in the market. Analysis of the adverse effects allows the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to gather post-market surveillance data. Post-market surveillance studies can be conducted for dental devices and study dental device issues such as incorrect usage, defects, and malfunctions[20]. There are situations where

randomised controlled trials cannot answer significant clinical questions. In such cases, the oral physicians can implement decision-making by sharing their clinical expertise. Here, the consensus plays a vital role. The Delphi consensus is an example of how oral health issues and concerns can be addressed through a consensus-based approach[21].

Effective communication between a dentist and a patient plays an important role in delivering high

standard dental care. To achieve good communication, a dentist should be capable of understanding the appropriate needs of their patients. Dental practitioners should also involve them in shared decision-making. Likewise, there are visual aid items and resource materials that help strengthen dentist-patient communication. Materials like 3D models, printed handouts, radiographs, and so on effectively assist the patients in understanding information related to their oral health. This also helps them to increase their adherence to dental care. Health experts dealing with the oral cavity have stated that visual aids do exert a positive effect on their patients[22]. Case reports are also a valuable source of information and help in assimilating scientific data on various diseases, their treatment protocols, adverse events associated with their medication, interventions, and complications. These reports also help us identify and observe changes in trends, serving as a major educational tool[23].

Dentistry is evolving swiftly, and various new treatment methods, skills, and appliances are being introduced regularly, ensuring that quality care is delivered to patients. Continuing dental education (CDE) programs help dentists with their professional and personal development. The Indian Dental Association (IDA) arranges and organizes several CDE programs across our country. A point system for CDE programs was introduced by the Dental Council of India (DCI). This system proposed that a dentist should gather 100 credit points within a five-year period, ensuring at least 20 and a maximum of 25 points each year, for relicensure. However, it is voluntary to participate in these CDE programs. National Oral Health Policy draft, India (2021), emphasised the importance of additional postdoctoral training for dental professionals to enhance the current trained manpower. Dental professionals gain deeper insights into the recent advances and treatment techniques introduced to prevent and manage oral diseases. Regular hands-on courses, tutorials, and



lectures are imperative for a dentist to establish a successful dental practice[24].

Clinical trials are crucial for establishing an evidence-based practice. It is obligatory to publish the research data. Before starting the clinical trial with the first patient, it is mandatory to register the trial with the Central Trial Registry of India (CTRI). All the registered trials are linked with the World Health Organization International Clinical Trial Registry Platform. This ensures and assures the quality of the trial conducted and raises the availability of evidence-based practice. Likewise, increasing the quantity and quality of trials in dentistry is also important[25]. To improve treatment efficacy, continuous technological advancements continue to occur. Digital centered human-centered automation has the potential to transform the entire field of dentistry, influenced by artificial intelligence, robotics, and machine learning. The introduction of 3D printing and digital X-rays has been instrumental in enhancing dental treatment planning[26].

Changes continue to occur in the market dynamics of every industry, including dentistry. It is crucial to continue tracking newly launched products. The product evaluation process is carried out to ensure the success of a product. There are several stages involved in product evaluation, such as concept and prototype testing, pretest market, test market, and launch, along with some emerging and complementary methods like brand equity analysis, need/usage context analysis, portfolio approach, pattern recognition, environmental scanning, straight judgment/vicarious input, and value-chain approach. Throughout its life, some products are continuously evaluated[27].

Healthcare professional (HCP) engagement and awareness are methods by which the pharmaceutical

companies strive to build a strong relationship with dental practitioners. The companies share information related to recent products launched, and other educational resources with respect to any new dental material, device, or technology. Methods include engaging dentists in webinars, seminars, and workshops, dental exhibitions (expos), CDE programs, and other networking events.

V. CONCLUSION

It is suggested that the fields of medicine and dentistry move beyond their current separate methods of operation and instead adopt a much-

needed integrated approach. In order to, achieve this, health care planning, legislative actions, and political efforts should be aligned with newly developed, somewhat interconnected medical and dental education programs globally. Only by doing so can physicians and dentists collaborate effectively in research, education, preventive measures, and patient care, with the specific goal of enhancing health equity worldwide[28].

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