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HOW MANAGERS CAN GET REPS READY FOR THE NEW YEAR

The Scoop on specialty sales

How to get in and be the best

by Rayna Herman and Rick Rosenthal

Whether you are a specialty representative who wants to get better or a primary care representative looking to make the move to specialty sales, the lessons derived from Lambertville, NJ-based Health Strategies Group's research of over 90 of the industry's best specialty representatives can help you reach your goal.

What is a specialty representative?

Companies define the specialty representative role in various ways. We distinguish specialty representatives from primary care representatives in three ways: Specialty representatives focus on one therapeutic area, call on specialists only, and sell one or more specialty products.

That last point begs the question: What is a specialty product? Specialty products meet at least one of the following four criteria:

- They are injectable or costly.
- They treat a disease that requires ongoing management by a specialist.
- They have a narrow base of prescribers and potential patients.
- They have a significant economic impact on a physician's practice.

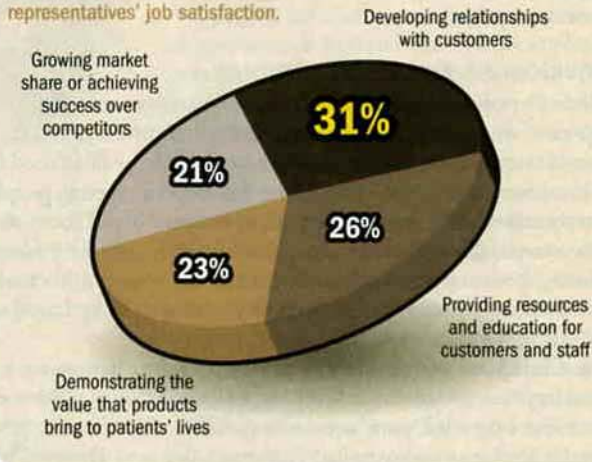
The number of specialty products continues to grow each year.

For the patients using specialty products, the stakes may literally be life or death. Specialty products often treat life-threatening conditions, such as cancer, or life-altering conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis. These high stakes mean that the sales representative must have an equivalent level of seriousness about his competence. Specialty representatives must balance multiple objectives and service to multiple stakeholders: their company, the customer and patients (see figure). Selling a specialty product requires strong prod-

a PR infograph

Multiple motivators

Several factors contribute to sales representatives' job satisfaction.



uct and disease state knowledge, as well as highly developed selling skills.

The table on page 27 lists common specialty representative responsibilities and the skills needed to perform them well. Current primary care representatives may possess some or all of these skills. If that describes you, you may be a great candidate for the move to specialty sales. Don't despair, however, if you doubt your current skill set. Our research can guide you toward improving your potential.

Today's specialty representatives

Our studies of specialty representatives reveal a profile appropriate for the demands of the role:

Diagnosis

You don't know what skills you need to become a successful specialty sales representative.

Prescription

Specialty sales requires advanced disease state and clinical knowledge, along with highly developed selling skills.

Specialty representative job demands

Responsibilities	Skills and attributes
Sell a specialty product	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong product and disease state knowledge• Sales skills• Knowledge and comfort discussing reimbursement
Manage a territory larger than typical primary care sales territories (the average specialty territory is 320 miles across, about the size of the average primary care district)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Planning, organization, time-management and prioritization skills
Call on physicians in multiple settings of care	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Account management skills• Ability to work effectively with administrative and clinical staff
Call on opinion leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advanced product and disease state knowledge• Relationship-building, negotiation and listening skills• Tact
Work with medical societies and patient organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Networking skills• Judgment, strategic thinking

Experienced. Their average time in the industry exceeds five years, including 3.7 years as a specialty representative.

Well-educated. Not every company requires advanced degrees. They do help; about 18% of specialty representatives have one, and another 5% are registered pharmacists (or have a doctorate in pharmacy), registered nurses, physician's assistants or nurse practitioners.

Hardworking. Specialty representatives work over 50 hours a week, averaging 55 calls on physicians and clinical staff and another 17 on nonclinical staff.

Active. Specialty reps are often involved with medical societies and patient advocacy groups.

Analytical. Specialty representatives spend hours every month creating, reviewing and revising territory action plans, analyzing territory business trends, and planning calls and programs. They freely share their plans with their colleagues and manager.

Specialists see clear differences between primary care and specialty representatives. According to these physicians, specialty representatives stand out in at least three ways:

1. They possess better knowledge about the disease and their product. Physician quote: "Specialty representatives have a higher level of knowledge and information being delivered."

2. They are capable of more in-depth discussion. Physician quote: "The specialty representatives get much more involved in the details of how their medications work and what specific types of patients their medications are indicated for."

3. They demonstrate better focus on doctors as customers. Physician quote: "Specialty sales representatives provide much more specialized information that is more applicable to my field."

Preparing for a specialty opportunity

Primary care reps who want to enter the world of specialty sales can prepare in the following ways:

Read more ... a lot more. You know your product's package insert and several studies, but you must learn more. Broaden your perspective. Learn about treatments your customers use

with or instead of your product, including prescription, over-the-counter and other remedies. Then take it to another level. Borrow medical journals from your customers. Discuss the articles when you return the journal (avoiding off-label promotion). Specialty district managers want representatives who stay current and can comfortably discuss medical literature.

Ask more questions ... of everyone. Use the ABCs: Always be curious. Ask doctors and nurses to describe their challenges in treating patients with the conditions you discuss. Listen for specifics about patient complaints, common treatment challenges and treatment techniques beyond picking medications. Learn how the treatment team members (doctors, nurses, pharmacists, etc.) work together. Every week, you talk with people in your territory who collectively possess hundreds of years of postgraduate education. They will teach you a lot if you ask and then listen.

Network and collaborate effectively ... especially with high-level physicians. Every territory has opinion leaders. Maybe you can't work with the author of a major medical textbook or the editor of a journal, but you probably know the chief of medicine at a local hospital or the president of the county medical society. Get involved with their practices and their leadership initiatives. When a specialty district manager has a vacancy, he looks for representatives with a record of collaborating with, negotiating with and influencing opinion leaders.

Improving as a specialty rep

If you are already working in the field as a specialty rep, the following will help you become better at what you do:

Think and act like someone who wants to help a patient. Ideally you do, of course! Doctors and nurses get up in the morning to help patients. That is what they are trying to do when you arrive at their office. When you demonstrate *through actions* that you share their goal, you distinguish yourself from other representatives and earn their trust. If local patient advocacy groups or physician organizations focus on the conditions your products treat (which is often the case with HIV, cancer and

rheumatoid arthritis), get involved. Do more than sell a drug – make that sale part of improving healthcare for patients in your territory.

Understand the needs of every member of the office staff – and serve them. In primary care sales, office staff members influence physician prescribing. In specialty sales, office staff may control prescribing. Most representatives understand the importance of working with the clinical office staff, such as registered nurses, nurse practitioners and physician's assistants. Nonclinical staff members, such as the office manager and the administrators handling billing and reimbursement, play an equally important role. Establish productive working relationships with them, too. Physicians notice and value representatives who try to educate and serve their office staff.

Understand the healthcare business. Be sensitive to how the use of specialty medicines can affect the physician's practice, sometimes positively, sometimes negatively. Beyond knowing the copays and prior authorization requirements for your products, understand the economic forces affecting your customer. Physicians are facing challenges from health plan contracting (particularly injectable carve-outs or management), malpractice insurance cost increases, and Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement changes, including coming Medicare Part D changes. Specialists need representatives who know today's complex economic environment.

High stakes, high returns

If you've been a representative for a while, you know that continuous professional development is one of the most attractive aspects of a pharmaceutical sales career. Right now, specialty sales presents an opportunity for a high return on an investment in deepening your knowledge and improving your skills. Our research shows that your efforts will be rewarded: Customers clearly

Specialty sales at a glance

Profile

Average tenure: 3.7 years
Percentage with an advanced degree: 18%
Percentage with a medical background: 5%
Average training when hired: 3.6 weeks
Percentage highly satisfied with job: 68%

Structure

Percentage of regions/districts that have reps who call only on specialists: 80%
Average territory size: 320 miles
Percentage with a copromotion partner in their territory: 52%

Territory activity

Average number of target physicians responsible for: 118
Average number of key opinion leaders in territory: 5.3
Physician calls per week (average): 28 to 34
Clinical staff calls per week (average): 27
Nonclinical staff calls per week (average): 17

perceive the superior qualities their specialty representatives bring, and they value the representatives' contributions to improving patient outcomes. This article has identified where you can invest in yourself and reap the returns from your customers, their patients and your company. The writing on the wall says the high growth in pharmaceutical sales will be in specialty markets; our research says that spells opportunity for the forward-looking, ambitious sales representative. Read it and reap.

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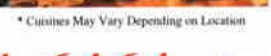
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