Globalizing Medical Information Support

A Strategic Roadmap with Practical Implications to Mitigate Risk and Reduce Costs

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INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, globalization is a critical investment for any business. According to International Monetary Fund estimates, emerging economies are expected to grow two to three times faster than developed nations like the US.[1] With this change in the landscape, it's critical to have a global presence and to develop a multi-cultural, regulatory compliant Medical Information strategy.

Geographic expansion of your medical information services into developing economies ensures authoritative, scientific information reaches audiences that need it to make patient safety decisions. However, globalization of any service cannot be successful without a well-organized strategic plan and understanding of potential risks.

While there are many benefits to resourcing a global medical information department through a single provider, some challenges still exist. A single internal or external provider can deliver services more fluidly, provide expertise and information across borders, reduce duplicate effort, increase consistency in responses, and provide higher quality, more timely information.

Some common growing pains associated with global expansion of medical information services include:

People	Process	Technology
▪ Finding / training Medical Information expertise to respond to growth in chronic, specialty, and rare diseases ▪ Development of staff and retention overseas ▪ Language barriers and cultural differences for training ▪ Fragmented budget and staffing	▪ Risk Management across regional and local regulatory domains ▪ Market access in emerging environments ▪ Alignment of initiatives and priorities ▪ Clarifying role/function definitions	▪ Aggregating emerging data sources ▪ Generating business intelligence from response trends ▪ Measuring operational value ▪ Leveraging new capabilities / communication channels

The following contains C3i Solutions' recommendations on each of these challenges and practical implications to mitigate risk and reduce costs to your business' globalization of medical information.

OPERATIONAL

Most drug manufacturers are expanding medical affairs responsibilities world-wide to enhance communication with medical professionals and develop better responses to treatments and outcomes. In doing so, they often worry about not only availability of knowledgeable medical information staff, but also finding the most efficient operational model.

The solution operationally is to think globally, but act locally, supported by a mix of sourcing models.
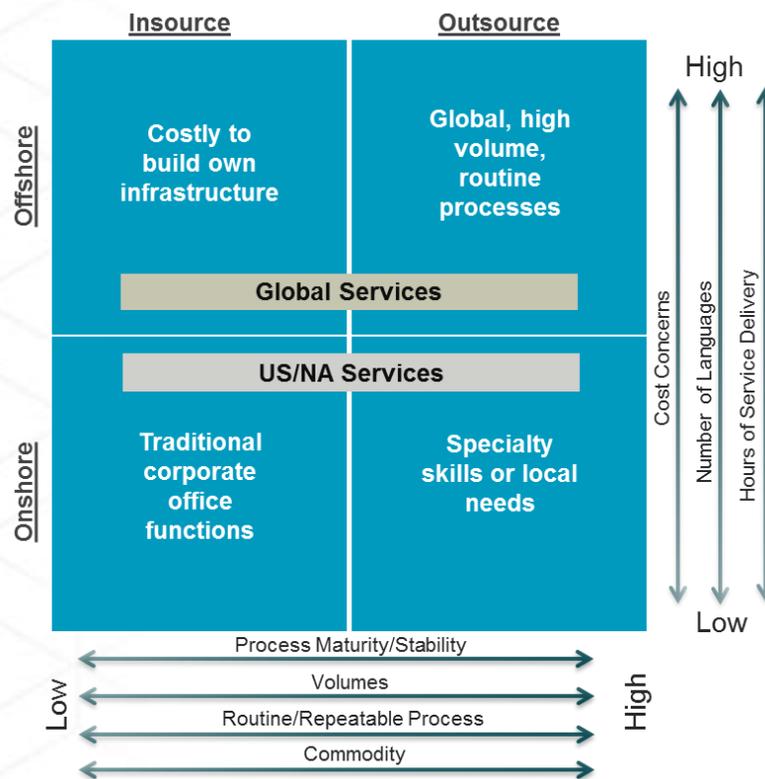
Good contenders for offshore outsourcing include global, high volume, routine processes, while specialty skills or local needs serve as great candidates for onshore outsourcing. For instance, approximately 27% of medical information contact centers are managed through local subsidiaries, 12% are managed through regional hubs, about 19% are managed only globally, and roughly 27% manage their medical information with a mix of global, regional and local subsidiaries contact centers.[11]

Similarly, it is recommended that costly technology infrastructure development be sent offshore, but insourced, while traditional corporate office functions would be best handled onshore by internal staff. This recommendation is closely aligned with findings from the C3i Solutions' Medical Information Benchmarking report, which illustrated that for most companies strategy and planning remain almost exclusively in house with only a small percentage of outsourcing while after hours support, medical writing, and technology capabilities are outsourced more often at 42%.[11]
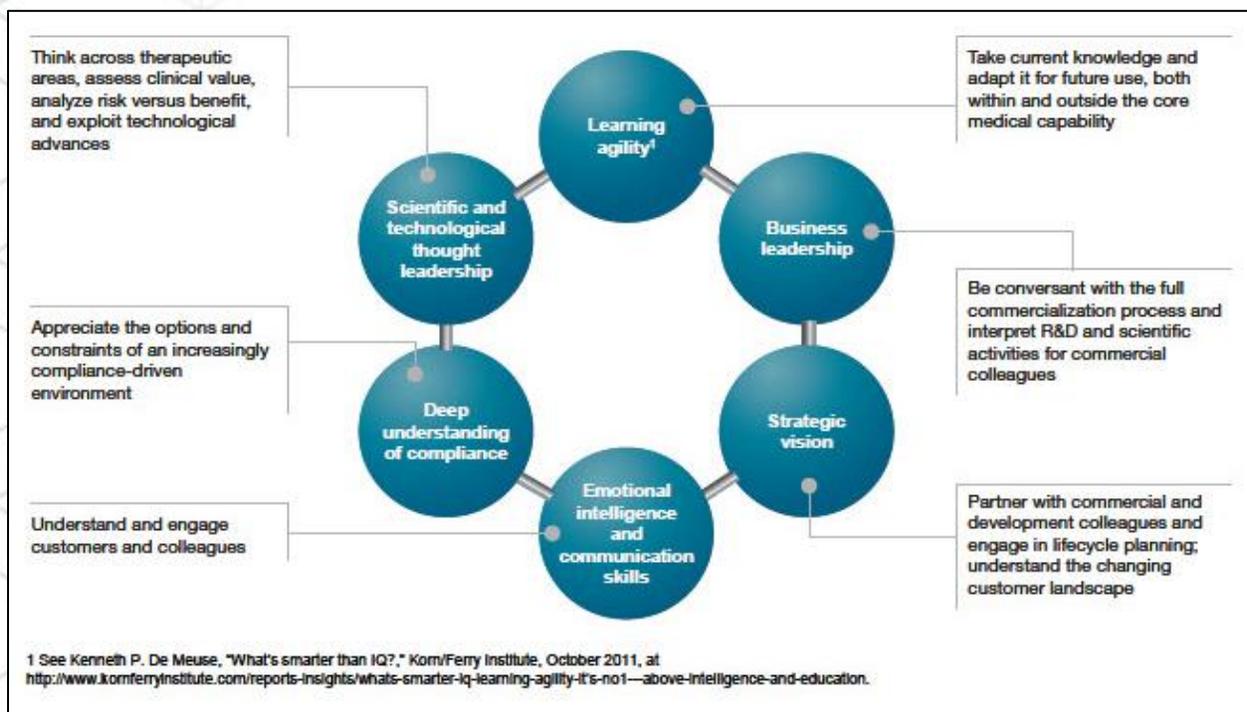
TEAM SUPPORT STRUCTURE AND MAKEUP

Professional medical affairs personnel need to not only have knowledge of the business, but also an ability to put processes in place. The optimal medical affairs team member will be able to understand business issues, science, and medicine, and have the ability to assimilate a lot of knowledge and skills quickly.

The key is to find candidates who have clinical/technical awareness, overall learning agility, business leadership and acumen, strategic vision, communication skills, deep understanding of compliance, and scientific thought leadership — all of which are important skills to ensure sustained success.

Companies with smaller medical affairs functions should focus on seeking strengths that match their specific therapeutic areas of focus and product lifecycle needs. It is crucial for companies to align recruitment with their overall strategy as well.

Building the right medical affairs competencies will be critical

Think across therapeutic areas, assess clinical value, analyze risk versus benefit, and exploit technological advances

Take current knowledge and adapt it for future use, both within and outside the core medical capability

Appreciate the options and constraints of an increasingly compliance-driven environment

Be conversant with the full commercialization process and interpret R&D and scientific activities for commercial colleagues

Understand and engage customers and colleagues

Partner with commercial and development colleagues and engage in lifecycle planning; understand the changing customer landscape

Learning agility[1]

Scientific and technological thought leadership

Business leadership

Deep understanding of compliance

Strategic vision

Emotional intelligence and communication skills

1 See Kenneth P. De Meuse, "What's smarter than IQ?," Korn/Ferry Institute, October 2011, at http://www.kornferryinstitute.com/reports-insights/whats-smarter-iq-learning-agility-it's-no1—above-intelligence-and-education.

CULTURAL COMPETENCY

When considering global expansion of your medical information services it is also important to consider cultural competency as a factor of a global department's success. Cultural competency is essential to medical information delivery because it enables providers to offer services that are respectful of and responsive to the health beliefs, practices and cultural and linguistic needs of diverse patients in each new territory.[7]

This is critical to reducing inconsistencies in global health care and improving access to high-quality information. When developed and implemented properly, cultural competence helps your medical information services department to accurately understand the needs of the different groups accessing health information and health care — or participating in research — and provide the highest quality information back to them in a way they can comprehend. [7]

Recommendations for increasing cultural competency within your organization include:

- Understanding country-specific patient needs through local patient advocacy groups
- Creating a knowledge base for the regulatory, public health, cultural, economic, security and geopolitical landscape for each country
- Taking into account local medical practices
- Embracing patient-centric healthcare by engaging and partnering with a larger network of healthcare stakeholders.

All of these initiatives will help your business to more fully understand the patient population and provide more targeted and valuable information.[5]

Other initiatives for comprehending the local culture are cultural competency and cultural sensitivity training, learning about existing market channels and suppliers, considering consumer preferences and current purchase behavior, and monitoring local economic developments and natural events that may affect business. This knowledge can assist you in developing insights around diverse cultures and belief systems and how they perceive health and illness and respond to various symptoms, disease and treatments.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Along with cultural competency, linguistic competency is important to accurately and effectively communicate medical information globally. Studies have shown that trained professional interpreters or bilingual health care professionals have a positive effect of patients' satisfaction, their quality of care, and health outcomes.[6]

Since it is most beneficial for patients and healthcare professionals to be provided scientific information in a form they can readily understand, it is recommended that when globalizing medical information services it is best to either utilize bilingual/multi-lingual partners or translation services, or have employees complete linguistic competency training to effectively communicate with diverse populations. These diverse populations can include individuals with limited English proficiency, low literacy skills, the disabled and individuals with hearing loss.

TECHNOLOGY

Experts warn that the use of the term "globalization" ignores the reality of the digital divide and social inequalities.[2] Enormous socio-economic differences exist between countries and regions, and it is known that the Internet network is mainly spreading in areas with a high GDP and an open and competitive telecommunications market.[2]

Conversely, the infrastructure in developing countries is largely insufficient to utilize the most current internet technologies. Unreliable connectivity, computer viruses, and limited bandwidth continue to present challenges when and where internet access is available in these regions. This is cause for concern for many companies hoping to expand medical information services into emerging markets.

Along with technical and implementation feasibility both being factors for concern, there are also country specific technical regulations, regional public opinion, testing and certification needs that can be hard to meet in developing economies. With these concerns in mind it is suggested that you first identify and understand medical influencers in each market and then develop effective and innovative ways to interact and partner with them. This will require a malleable and multi-channel engagement model that can easily adapt to changing communication landscapes and regional customer preferences. More sophisticated systems and tools will be needed to prioritize and track interactions while new policies and processes will be required to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest in medical interactions.[5]

In accordance with the mhealth revolution, the behavior and expectations of both patients and physicians over the next five to ten years will increasingly follow trends enabled by technology advances.[5] If you are planning on expanding your medical information services into new markets you must learn to embrace and experiment with new technologies in mobility and social media to be well positioned for the future.[5]

In addition, the mhealth revolution will mean a greater demand for transparent data globally. The types of medical data that are relevant for a product will increase significantly and will include real-world evidence and patient-generated data, which can be used to derive new insights and improve future health outcomes. Areas of interest in educating HCPs include:
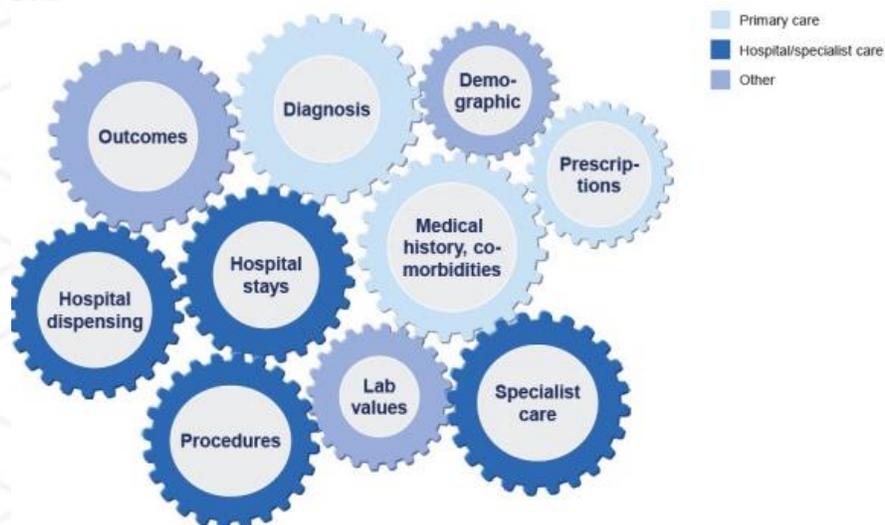
SCALABILITY

Continued pressure from regulatory agencies and public sentiment have pushed more and more activities into Medical Affairs organizations and with this brings additional challenges for globalization.[5] The most common challenges in scaling up in medical affairs in emerging markets include:

Cost of Scaling Up

The cost of scaling medical affairs department can quickly become overwhelming when considering that adding additional staff members involves more than just salary. Scaling involves training, additional infrastructure and equipment, recurrent costs for staff salaries, and operating costs. It can become quite a burden on a small business.

Availability of Local Skills, Knowledge and Resources

In addition to cost concerns, other constraints to scaling in an emerging market include availability of local skills, knowledge and resources. To ensure success, you must acquire and develop the talent to cultivate and build a strong, multi-faceted medical affairs organization which can be a difficult task to complete across the globe. The skillset required by personnel would include strategic thinking, basic commercial skills, cross-functional collaboration, teamwork and scientific leadership.[5]

If you are having a hard time finding the right people, you could also choose to partner with a provider who has more experience with proper scaling and will allow your internal medical affairs staff to remain focused on internal processes. The wide range of scope for medical affairs teams includes CME, thought leadership development, drug information, outcomes, trial strategy, medical liaisons and publications, all of which might be more easily found by an experienced partner.

Quality Concerns

Another concern involves how to deliver *quality* medical information at scale. In order to provide high quality medical information services globally, you must drive internal efficiency by integrating relevant medical insights into a central knowledge repository that includes internal medical data, publications and external knowledge from physicians and medical institutions. If key service delivery issues are your biggest problem, partnerships with experienced service providers can help you to fill in those gaps. Success in the future will require strong relationships with a broader range of stakeholders.[5]

Critical Success Factors for Effective Medical Affairs: Adequate Resources; Support from Senior Leadership; Strategic Planning & Well-Defined Priorities; Hiring & Retaining Top Quality Staff; Continuous People Development; Developing Strong Internal & External Partner Relationships; Sound Organizational Management/Leadership; Focus on Innovation & Outcomes; Collaborating/Communicating w/ Stakeholders; Demonstrating Medical Affairs Business Value

CONCLUSION

The world of healthcare and technology are continually evolving and as it does the landscape of healthcare services also need to adapt and advance. The medical affairs sector is growing and changing significantly due to rising healthcare costs, population growth in emerging markets, advances in technology, changing product landscapes, and regulatory pressures re-enforcing the role of medical affairs.

As the demand for medical information increases and consumers become more active participants in their healthcare, Medical Affairs will be the trusted partner organization to guide healthcare professionals and consumers seeking to make informed science-based decisions regarding their health concerns globally.

With more involved consumers and healthcare professionals global expansion of medical information contact centers is becoming the norm and they are also being asked to provide increasing services to customers, regulators as well as their own organizations.

Medical information contact centers are undergoing global integration.

The majority of pharmaceutical companies operate globally servicing hundreds of countries and languages. It is a common goal of pharmaceutical companies to provide consistent messaging and quality of service to all of the regions in which they operate. The future of the medical information contact center will allow a customer to find accurate, quality, up-to-date answers to their inquiries regardless of country, language or time of day.

Global medical information contact centers will adopt new avenues of communication to incorporate the customer/healthcare professional's preferred channel in each region.

With the evolution of communication including text/SMS, social media, chat and more which bring interaction to a level that far exceeds the traditional phone, mail, fax and email, the adoption of new communication platforms will need to emerge to meet customer expectations/demands in each country and provide a high level of customer satisfaction. Cultural competency is necessary to determine how best to communicate health information with individuals across the globe.

Medical information technology will become more efficient and customer/healthcare professional friendly.

The world is a busy place, and with the traditional work hours of 9-5 becoming a thing of the past, customers and healthcare professionals want to be able to obtain information on their own time through the method easiest for them. One end-to-end platform with multi-channel capabilities including self-service portals, and a complete 360° view of each individual's interaction history with the pharmaceutical company will be a vital asset in improving healthcare outcomes. The mHealth revolution will encourage more transparent and personalized data models.

As regulations become more stringent, ensuring compliance and measuring quality and performance will become even more important for medical information contact centers.

The medical information contact center is often the first source of interaction the customer or healthcare professional has with the organization and will set the association with the individual(s) for level of customer service, quality of information and timeliness with which your company can provide. Advances in analytics and dashboard metrics allow an organization to monitor exactly how customers are interacting with your company and their satisfaction levels. This helps leaders make program recommendations, better allocate resources and suggest program enhancements, maximizing program effectiveness. Understanding differences in regulations on a country-by-country level will also help to ensure compliant, effective global medical information is provided and make certain the success of your global medical affairs services.

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ABOUT C3I SOLUTIONS

C3i Solutions, an HCL Techonologies Company, is a multi-channel customer engagement services provider, specializing in global, high-touch consumer, patient, and end-user management.

For the past 35 years, our unique, multi-channel approach and experience in highly regulated industries have made us the partner-of-choice for some of the world's most trusted brands.

With a strategic focus on innovation, we excel at protecting our clients' brands, while maximizing productivity and cost efficiency.

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