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Ashfield Alliance: outsourcing for outcomes

As the one-size-fits-all approach to pharmaceutical sales and marketing disappears, Ashfield Alliance looks to new communication channels and tailors its global outsourcing expertise to outcomes

Photos Magnus Rew/Ashfield Alliance

Ashfield Alliance might seem like the new kid on the block as it sets up shop in the UK and Ireland, but with more than 15 years' experience on American soil, Ashfield In2Focus' new division is a force to be reckoned with. It's a brave move to establish a new arm during an era of purse-tightening and healthcare system upheaval, but the company believes it can provide the innovative ways of communicating with healthcare stakeholders that are needed as the industry moves forward.

"Sophistication" and "diversity" are just two of the buzzwords Ashfield Alliance uses to explain the ways the outsourcing service company can support brands beyond the traditional sales representative as it aims to help align the industry to the outcomes environment.

"There is a definite move towards outcomes in the selling space," notes managing director, Fiona Morgan, but pharma's success in realigning has been "variable" to say the least, she adds. "While we have worked for a long time from a traditional sales model, people who are involved with the commercialisation of brands now have to truly understand the healthcare professional environment, the regulatory setting, the patient experience and how to ethically and appropriately support these brands for win-win outcomes... It is critical that pharma companies align themselves to the healthcare system within which they operate," she says.

The ethos Ashfield Alliance wants to bring to pharma is that to be able to work in partnership requires complete understanding of the surroundings. As Morgan explains: "The healthcare professionals need to drive value for money

and, together with the pharma companies, we need to make sure the needs of the healthcare environment are met. To do this we have to work together, as industry and healthcare providers, in a synergistic way and adapt at a local level." Don't go on what you think you know and actively avoid over-relying on assumptions in your decision-making; "always go the extra mile and understand both the patient and the HCP experience". The patient should be at the centre of every pharma activity and greater "joined-up thinking and innovation for cost-effective solutions that drive patient outcomes" will contribute towards a pharma company's success in the future, she adds.

And this is where Ashfield Alliance comes in. "We are very much collaborative advisers, solution refiners and deliverers," Morgan points out. So the company creates a customer-specific range of effective bespoke solutions across a range of communication channels to support clients in achieving their objectives, whether it's customer acquisition, patient retention, risk management strategies or commercial solutions for improved market access. The beauty, she observes, is that the move into the UK and Ireland means the company can provide unique global solutions for its clients across the entire sales and marketing mix, supporting a brand's lifecycle from R&D right through to patent expiry.

For example, the company has set up new ways to meet healthcare professionals' changing communication preferences. Rather than a representative going in to talk face to face with the healthcare professional, "information specialists" liaise with the HCP over the phone while jointly logging into microsites providing medicines and disease



Fiona Morgan, managing director, Ashfield Alliance



information. “Nowadays, information sharing doesn’t have to happen in the same room,” explains Morgan. Teledetailing can have a number of advantages – allowing more HCPs to be approached in a day over a wider geographical area, as well as in different languages, and it can also be an efficient use of resources for maternity or vacancy cover.

Ashfield Alliance also provides remote communications for medical education and patient adherence support to drive healthcare outcomes directly. “When patients are in a trial setting they take the medication precisely as they are meant to, but we know in the real world this isn’t the case.” Our programmes mean we can encourage the patient to adhere to their treatment while simultaneously enabling the pharma company to achieve the predicted outcomes of their clinical trials investment. This could be through employing nurses or pharmacists, or developing a technology solution, for example sending text messages as medicine reminders. We are focused on individual choices for patients and meeting specific corporate requirements, Morgan says. “Everything is tailored – even down to smartphone apps.”

Of course, digital is a cornerstone for these services. “Going digital is critical and it makes sense that pharma, its products and support, works with this,” says Morgan. “The beauty of what we do is to combine technological expertise with the communications environment to drive bespoke programmes for any brand, therapy area or marketing campaign, be it pharma, over-the-counter or veterinary.”

But it’s not just about the shiny new technology, Morgan stresses, as the company also recognises that traditional channels of customer communication can still play an integral part in delivering information to healthcare professionals. As such Ashfield Alliance is set up to be truly flexible with the solutions it can provide. “What we want is for companies to think ‘I need to outsource medical information, closed loop marketing, teledetailing people, and inform GPs about a new licence for an existing brand’. We want them to think: ‘We need Ashfield Alliance.’”

Ashfield Alliance is currently recruiting for multilingual positions in sales, medical information, pharmacovigilance, pharmacists and nurses, as well as specialist healthcare communicators with an interest in using technological innovation to support patient outcomes.

For more information, email: careers@ashfieldalliance.com