

BOBI awards 2007

Best Use of Secondary Data

Executive Summary

Re-enforcing the need for appropriate therapy in the asthma market

Anecdotal evidence suggests that most asthmatics are treated in accordance with guidelines. However, primary market research amongst patients shows that many continue to rely heavily on their reliever, suggesting that symptom control remains sub-optimal.

Acme Pharmaceuticals used a longitudinal patient database to show that over 50% of asthmatics were not controlled on their existing medication. This information was used to generate a series of PR hooks and various market shaping materials for the sales force. As a result of this new insight, healthcare professionals were encouraged to review patients' therapy, leading to an increase in sales for the Acme brands.

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Example Entry

Background / Situation Analysis

The treatment of asthma in the UK is increasingly aligned with the BTS (British Thoracic Society) and SIGN (Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network) guidelines. These outline the aims of asthma management and recommend the use of different therapies at different stages in the treatment progression.

Acme Pharmaceuticals are a major player in the asthma market. They have a range of products appropriate for use at different steps in the BTS/SIGN guidelines.

While anecdotal evidence from the field suggests that the therapy /therapy combinations used are in line with the guidelines, primary market research shows that - despite this - many patients remain uncontrolled and rely heavily on their relief medication. The guidelines specify that patients who need to use their reliever more than once a day should be moved up to the next step but little is known about how frequently this actually happens.

Research Objectives

1. To compare the reality of asthma treatment in General Practice with that laid down in the BTS/SIGN guidelines
2. To determine levels of control at different steps within the guidelines

Approach

Using computerised medical records from a longitudinal patient database, asthmatics were allocated to one of the BTS/SIGN steps according to the different therapies they were prescribed. This involved working out how long each prescription was likely to last and included reference to the World Health Organisation's default daily dose file for those prescriptions where this could not be calculated directly.

The use of observational data precluded asking patients directly about their symptoms, so the number of short-acting beta-2 agonist inhalers

issued to each patient during the review period was used as a proxy measure of control. This incorporated a set of rules designed to make allowances for patients with, for example, different reliever inhalers in different locations and for the 'test firing' of inhalers.

Fulfilment of Research Objectives / Recommendations Made

While the initial segmentation showed that asthmatics were generally being treated with a therapy/therapy combination which placed them into *one* of the recognised steps on the treatment progression, the data on the proportion of these who were controlled or not showed that the majority were almost certainly at the *wrong* step. This was particularly true of patients lower down the guidelines – those on relief therapy only who needed preventive therapy and those on low-dose inhaled steroids who would probably have benefited from a move to a higher dose.

The research identified a clear need for more active management of asthmatics in General Practice as despite advances in adherence to treatment protocols, many patients were still sub-optimally controlled.

Successful Outcomes / Impact on UK Business

The research was used to generate a series of PR hooks and various market shaping materials for the sales force, as well as a paper in the European Respiratory Journal, all of which resonated well with healthcare professionals. Acme thus shifted their promotional emphasis from the need to treat with preventive therapies to the need to treat with *appropriate* dosages of preventive therapies, a shift of emphasis which resulted in an increase in sales and a further strengthening of their position in the market.