



## **Healthcare market research: what it is, and what it isn't. Some myths exploded.....**

### **Market researchers stand on the street with a clipboard annoying members of the public with questions**

Carrying out research does involve asking people questions, but, especially in the Healthcare arena, this rarely involves pulling random members of the public off the street to complete a clipboard survey!

In Healthcare MR, our clients are most interested in the beliefs and behaviours of their customers: healthcare professionals (HCPs). Agencies have access to thousands of HCPs, from GPs to oncologists, via their panels. Panel members agree to be contacted by MR agencies to take part in various studies and are paid for their time, so we don't do any cold calling either. This is usually in the form of an online survey which they can complete in their own time – so no standing on a street with a clip board!

Sometimes the detail provided by an online study will not be sufficient to understand the research area. In this case we might decide to speak to the HCPs face-to-face either individually or in group, so that we can talk around the subject matter. Agencies have trained recruiters who arrange interviews that usually take place in a central location such as a viewing studio, where the interested parties can observe. Again – no standing on a street with a clip board!

### **Healthcare MR is all about sick people and diseases**

As well as traditional marketing we also do a lot to help organizations promote health and to understand health systems and policy. For example:

- Helping primary care trusts find ways to improve their smoking cessation services
- Providing an understanding of distribution channels to enable a company to efficiently restructure their supply chain
- Helping a client to explore ways health guidelines might effect their business areas

## **You will be stuck behind a desk all day, everyday**

One of the great things about Healthcare MR is that there are many opportunities to get out of the office:

- We regularly visit clients either to present research results, discuss a project brief, or even just to catch up on their business changes. If you wish to focus on business development client visits will be a major part of your job
- Getting out and about interviewing respondents is part of a researcher's role when working on qualitative studies. If you work on international projects this could mean traveling to Europe, the US or even countries such as Thailand.

## **You have to have a medical or science background to succeed in Healthcare MR**

People working in Healthcare MR come from a range of different backgrounds, from Geography to French & Business – there are no degree discipline requirements. You do not need any prior knowledge about different conditions or therapies, but part of the fun of the job is that you get learn a lot about these sorts of things in your day to day role!

However quite a few science graduates do choose a career in Healthcare MR as it allows them to continue to follow their interests without being stuck in a lab (which can often seem like the only option at university)!

The key skills required by a role in Healthcare MR are:

- Organisation – you often have to juggle various projects and tasks at one time
- Analysis – being able to turn data into a meaningful story & not being put off by pages of numbers or hours of interview tapes
- Eye for detail – it is the detail that really adds value in the presentations we deliver to clients
- Communication – you spend a lot of time liaising with clients, internal suppliers and project teams
- Creativity – 'thinking outside the box' helps in every aspect of the project process from study design to presentation preparation
- Investigative – the MR industry is all about asking questions and continuous learning

If that sounds like you – consider a career in Healthcare MR

## **It's not as interesting as Consumer Research**

Some of the biggest brands out there are pharmaceutical products, for example Prozac and Viagra, and part of our role is to help our clients make marketing decisions worth hundred of thousands of pounds on such brands.

Prescribing decisions made by HCPs, although similar to the consumer buying process, have many more influencing factors: budget, health guidelines, formulary restrictions etc. They also are part of a much more important process – how can I improve a cancer patient's quality of life, compared to: what am I going to have for dinner tonight!

Choice of drug is often based on very rational opinions but there are also underlying emotional attachments to pharmaceutical brands, just like there are with supermarkets, for example. So don't think that everything about a drug brand is clinical because there is a lot of creativity in creating a drug brand identity.

## **Market Researchers are just glorified project managers**

As a market researcher your role does involve coordinating different aspects of the project from start to finish – but that is just a tiny part of the job!

It is really important that an MR agency fully understands a client's business issue so that they can design a comprehensive study approach and deliver actionable results. Agencies work in partnership with clients and are very much involved in the decision making process.