

# Medical Science Liaison (MSL). Understanding, Engaging & Interacting

Gillian Logan, Regional Medical Affairs Manager, Takeda

Write-up by Philippa Shiels, AXESS Ltd



Gillian Logan

## Summary

**Gillian Logan delivered an informative presentation about the developing MSL role in the pharmaceutical industry. It was a useful insight into the day to day activities of an MSL and the invaluable role they play in connecting the pharmaceutical industry with Opinion Leaders. This was a really relevant topic for the PIPA audience as there is considerable overlap between the Medical Information and MSL functions and the two teams need to work seamlessly together for maximum impact.**

### Understanding the MSL Role

The MSL role is still comparatively new in the Pharmaceutical industry; however the function is steadily growing. As a recruiter in this market I have seen for myself the increase in teams over the past five years and the value pharmaceutical companies place with these teams.

*“There has been a 48% increase in MSL numbers from 2003 to 2008”*

*(Wall Street Journal 2009)*

Each company structure the MSL role differently and there are many titles used by industry for this position. The following are just a few examples:

- Regional Medical Advisors
- Medical Liaison Managers
- Clinical Science Liaison
- Regional Science Liaison

The remit of an MSL varies from company to company ranging from pure field based roles to “hybrid” roles that include both key opinion leader and brand development responsibilities. At this stage in the presentation Gillian invited feedback from the group on the MSL Function:

**Have you ever heard of the MSL Role?** – All the group had.

**Have you ever worked at the same company as an MSL team or interacted with an MSL team?** – Approximately half the group had worked or been involved with an MSL team previously.



Phillippa Shiels

**Have you ever been part of an MSL team?** – Approximately five people had been part of an MSL team.

MSLs are the medical and scientific experts for a particular therapy area whose responsibility it is to build collaborative relationships with opinion leaders. MSLs facilitate the exchange of unbiased scientific information between the medical community and the pharmaceutical industry. All MSLs report to the medical department and are entirely non promotional. There is still some misconception that MSLs are “Super Reps”. This is certainly not the case and MSL must strictly adhere to ABPI code.

**“MSLs are NOT Super-Reps!”**

MSLs are usually Physicians, Pharmacists, PhD graduates or Healthcare Professionals and will often have relevant therapy area experience. Most MSLs will have had some previous industry experience either in Medical Information, Clinical Research or Medical Sales and will have strong communication skills and be a strong networker. Some individuals however will move into the MSL role straight from academia but will usually have some existing therapy area experience to bring to the role. In my experience in recruiting in this area there is no clear route to market with these positions and most managers will welcome a mix of experience in their teams.

MSLs require the following skills:

- Self Starter
- Strong Communication Skills
- Relevant therapeutic expertise
- Ability to Train/Teach
- Fast Learner
- Ability to network and matrix manage
- Ability to travel (Up to 50 % in some cases)

### Core Activities of an MSL



**Scientific Exchange** - MSLs respond to unsolicited requests from healthcare professionals. The most common requests are for clinical evidence, competitor information, updates on new data and off label discussions. MSLs will also provide suitable resources and materials to healthcare professionals such as slide sets. The MSL/HCP interactions are invaluable, not only to the Opinion Leaders but also to the pharmaceutical industry. These interactions build company advocacy as well as being an opportunity to collate Opinion Leader feedback and insights in relation to product strategy. MSLs will identify future speakers as well as investigator sites.

**Congress Attendance** – At congress MSLs will attend relevant sessions, conduct round table discussions or advisory boards as well as collating competitor activity. They will also provide context on scientific data.

**Supporting Investigator Research** - Arguably the most important aspect of the MSL position is the identification and continued liaison of potential investigators. MSLs will also facilitate Opinion Leader input into product life cycle plans and supplementary clinical trials. MSLs will also manage investigator sponsored research proposals and processes.

**Providing Support to Internal Partners** – MSLs provide scientific and technical support to internal colleagues.



### Collaboration with Internal Colleagues

There is some overlap between the MSL and Medical Information functions and therefore there must be strong communication and interaction between the two teams. Both functions provide input into sales force and marketing materials and they will both conduct literature searches and write standard responses. The MSL role is challenging as they need to keep up with all the latest data as well as finding time to conduct desk work as they are always on the move. Therefore the MSL/MIO partnership is paramount to ensure consistency and compliance.

### Comparison of the MSL and Med Info Role

Activity	MSL	Medical Info
Respond to unsolicited requests for med info ( <i>in the field</i> )	(✓)	✓
Provide medical and scientific support to internal teams	✓	✓✓
Provide insights on topics of interest based on HCP enquiries and interactions to drive standard letter and resource development	✓	✓
Input into development and approval of salesforce materials and briefs	✓	✓✓
Conduct literature searches and write standard medical information response letters based on unsolicited enquiries	✓	✓✓
Identify and interact with opinion leaders (OL's) and HCPs on a <i>regular basis</i> , developing long-term peer to peer relationships	✓	-
Support with identification and liaison of potential and existing clinical trial sites	✓	-
Facilitate Investigator Sponsored Research requests	✓	-
Provide relevant medical education to HCPs in line with regional medical plans	✓	-

### MSLs and Medical Information Working in Partnership

- Medical Information and MSLs can often have two different reporting lines. Gillian explained that at Takeda Medical Information report into the NHS Regulatory Affairs Director whereas the MSLs team report to the UK Medical Director. It is therefore imperative that they are strong lines of communication between these groups as their roles have considerable overlap. Takeda currently align one MSL to the Medical Information team to ensure open lines of communication and that they attend all relevant meetings. This individual will act as the "liaison" between both teams. MSLs and Medical Information must have a joint approach to awareness and share resources such as standards letters, slide

sets and the resource library. At AXESS I see many medical information officers moving into MSL teams because of their shared responsibilities.

“Joint working and initiatives optimise services and increase value to the company”

### Challenges of the MSL Role

- Keeping up with the latest scientific information and trends
- Finding the time to conduct desk work as always “on the move”
- Working remotely
- Compliance and AE Reporting

### Conclusions

- The MSL function is still relatively new to the pharmaceutical industry, however their numbers are growing
- The role is highly varied and challenging
- Although distinct roles, the MSL and MI teams share similar responsibilities and activities
- The MSLs teams can work effectively together to optimise services and increase value to the company



### CK Clinical – Specialists in Medical Information, Medical Affairs and Pharmacovigilance Recruitment.

On the look out for a new position? Here are a selection of our current vacancies...

#### Associate Director - Patient Safety

Ref: 22517  
Location: Cambridgeshire

We are recruiting for an Associate Director in Patient Safety to join an established Pharmaceutical company in Cambridgeshire. Your responsibilities will cover all projects assigned to the organisational unit, acting as an advisor to staff members to meet schedules or resolve technical or operational problems. You will directly participate in establishing and administering centralised functional projects. You will develop and administer budgets, schedules, and performance standards. Previous line management experience is essential.

#### Medical Liaison Executive

Ref: 22410  
Location: Scotland

An exciting opportunity has come up as a Medical Liaison Executive to join a Pharmaceutical company in a field-based role in Scotland. You will be providing balanced non promotional high level scientific and technical support to internal and external customers. You will need to provide medical leadership to your area of responsibility to ensure any requested scientific support from HCPs is provided in an ABPI Code compliant manner. Experience in Oncology and a good commercial awareness would be beneficial.

#### Training and Quality Systems Specialist

Ref: 22438  
Location: Surrey

We are recruiting for a Training and Quality Systems Specialist to be based in Surrey. You will support the Head of Pharmacovigilance and Pharmacovigilance Managers in the provision of the highest standards of pharmacovigilance training. You will help with the efficient management of quality documents in the UK and Ireland pharmacovigilance functions in accordance with corporate guidelines, local regulations and company best practices. Operations experience and a very good understanding of ICH and GCP guidelines would be beneficial.

#### Medical Information and Patient Safety Advisor

Ref: 22530  
Location: Bedfordshire

A new opportunity is available for a Medical Information and Patient Safety Advisor to join an established Pharmaceutical company in Bedfordshire. Your position will require you to focus on providing high quality, comprehensive, technical and scientific information service for external customers on the company's product range. You will be supporting and enhancing the safe and effective use of products, enabling customers to make informed decisions about the product range. You will provide knowledge and expertise to internal and external customers on all aspects of Drug Safety relating to the UK activities. Previous experience in both Drug Safety and Medical Information would be beneficial.



Sound Interesting? For more information regarding any of the above roles, please contact Hendre Moolman at CK Clinical on 01438 870 023 or email [hmoolman@ckclinical.co.uk](mailto:hmoolman@ckclinical.co.uk).

T: 01438 743047

E: [info@ckclinical.co.uk](mailto:info@ckclinical.co.uk)

W: [www.ckclinical.co.uk](http://www.ckclinical.co.uk)

CK Clinical Ltd 9 High Street Stevenage Old Town Hertfordshire SG1 3BG

