



# Why Field Reps Are Key to HCP and Patient Satisfaction

*Field rep interactions can make or break HCP satisfaction with a pharma support program. Therefore, it is critical to ensure organizational alignment on the utilization of field reps, understand how frequently reps should interact with offices, and know which people skills to promote/avoid to optimize interactions with HCPs.*

Program awareness is a key ingredient of a successful patient support program. Field reps are often the face of the program, as they discuss support offerings and explain high-level processes during their visits with treating healthcare providers (HCP). According to Nuvera Life Science Consulting's recent surveys of more than 1,400 oncology and neurology MDs and their support staffs, field reps rank as the most influential channel driving support program awareness.

**Introduction:** Field reps play an integral role in generating HCP awareness of manufacturer-sponsored patient support programs. Looking at **The PURE Report: Oncology 2020**, which explores the impact various channels have on program awareness through a survey of more than 500 HCPs, field reps were listed as the most important channel for learning about support offerings. This is consistent with findings from previous PURE Report studies in

oncology and neurology. With physicians and support staff unanimously ranking field rep engagement ahead of other channels (website materials, specialty pharmacy interactions, leave-behinds, etc.) for program awareness, it is imperative for reps to understand *how* and *when* to interact with HCPs.

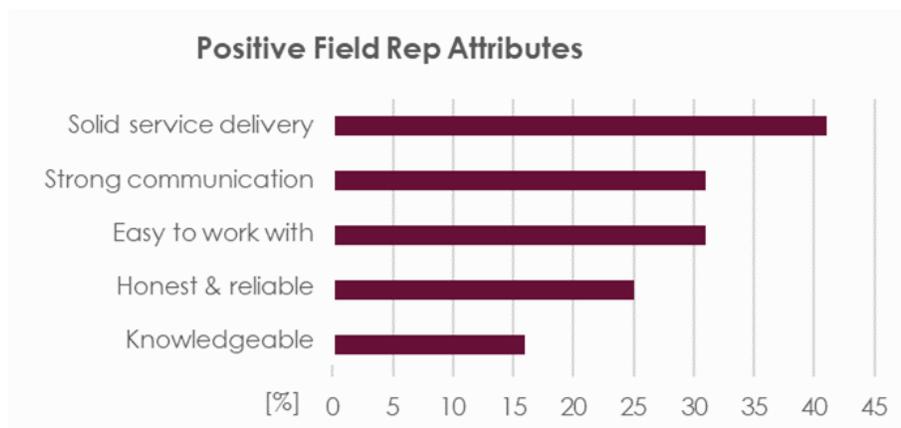


Figure 1. Breakdown of MD rankings of top field rep attributes for HCP-rep interactions. Note: The graph displays only the top attributes; the list is not exhaustive.



Figure 2. Segmentation analysis of field rep qualities among MDs

Interestingly, the field rep quality that MDs value the most is the rep ability to deliver solid support (see Figure 1). This creates a symbiotic relationship in that a strong support program increases the odds of MDs liking its reps while great reps increase program awareness and satisfaction among MDs.

Other factors that influence field rep likability are their ability to communicate and respond to issues/questions, the ease of working with them, and their perceived honesty. These skills are all softer in nature and consequently tied more to people skills.

The PURE Report: Oncology 2020 also ranked manufacturers based on field rep engagement. Merck and Novartis received high scores with many positive mentions while Lilly and Sanofi showed room for improvement. As for which attributes individual companies are known for, HCPs singled out Celgene for its strength in hard skills (e.g., knowledgeable reps) whereas AstraZeneca's reps are known more for soft-skill attributes (e.g., trustworthy reps). The profile of a company's field reps—and, consequently, HCP perceptions of them—most likely stems from early recruiting, training efforts, and company culture.

Physicians and their support staffs have a fairly uniform preference for how often they want to see field reps to discuss pharma support programs: About 50% want to see reps at least once a month. The preferred visit frequency differs by account type and, interestingly, MDs with high program awareness have a stronger desire to see reps more frequently than MDs with lower program familiarity.

Manufacturers may wonder how COVID-19 is influencing HCP engagement with field reps now that general foot traffic in offices is reduced and many clinics are replacing in-office visits with telehealth consultations. Video conferences between HCPs and field reps have increased drastically during the pandemic, and there will most likely be a permanent imprint, with heightened

technology utilization for HCP-rep communication following the COVID-19 era.

**Call to Action:** Given field reps' impact on support program awareness and satisfaction, manufacturers should ensure that their reps' face time with HCPs includes discussing support programs. Also create a profile of each office, made accessible to all reps, that captures how often each account wants to see its rep, since preference for visit frequency can vary from a few times a month to once a year.

Additionally, it is critical for manufacturers to understand what their programs' field reps are known for and why they are liked or disliked. Do these attributes overlap with the field rep qualities that HCPs deem most important? Are there any attributes that could be changed through training and coaching? For example, are reps' talking points for MDs clear and easy to understand? Do reps know enough about the support program? Knowing the company's strengths and weaknesses compared to the competition will also inform the appropriate actions to take.

**About The PURE Report:** This white paper focuses on just a small part of the broader PURE Report, an independent, syndicated study of HCP satisfaction with manufacturers' patient support services, along with manufacturer rankings across 7 PURE indices. The latest **PURE (Patient services Utilization, Recognition, and Experience) Report** was conducted with 500 oncology HCPs (150 MDs and 350 support staff). Studies of other therapeutic areas are underway.

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