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MAJORING IN CHANGE

When it comes to conveying the massive changes that have transformed industry, traditional college degree programs sometimes fall short. The answer may be next-generation education taught by faculty with experience in pharma marketing, writes **Joe Dysart**

University students ogling lucrative careers in pharma marketing are running up against a disturbing truth on campus: the traditional marketing degree will not prepare them for the rapidly changing pharma business, according to some educators who also have top-level jobs in pharma marketing.

“There’s too much emphasis in college marketing education on the traditional sales-rep approach to marketing—a paradigm that’s decades old,” says Partha Anbil, an adjunct professor of global marketing strategy at Temple University.

These educators say too many programs don’t meaningfully convey how technological changes—the rise of social media, the advent of supercomputers, and the growing use of remote-sensing devices, to name a few—are changing pharma marketing.

Moreover, too many marketing programs don’t prepare students for the realization that pharma marketing is less about “selling stuff,” these days, and more about forging deep partnerships that customers value.

Indeed, undergraduate business programs are including “more relevant” healthcare and pharma marketing courses, but they’re geared “to help younger students better prepare for their

roles as healthcare consumers,” says Lisa Flaiz, Janssen group product director, digital marketing. Meanwhile, Flaiz, an adjunct professor at St. Joseph’s University, says graduate-level offerings “are evolving to better equip our future marketers... to meet the needs of e-savvy patients.”

Nevertheless, many more programs need to grapple with the fact that such major players in healthcare as WellPoint and Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center lease time on IBM’s Watson supercomputer to run Big Data analytics, says Anbil, who is a consultant in IBM’s healthcare and life sciences practice.

And they need to bring home for students how the rush to supercomputers by Big Pharma and other healthcare organizations will revolutionize the way marketing is done, he adds.

Those supercomputers will be used to enhance Big Data analytics underway at drug companies, Anbil says. Pharma marketers, for example, have crunched data from local pharmacies to identify doctors who are more prone to write prescriptions for new medications, as well as those who take a more conservative approach.

Too many programs also sell students short on the influence social media is having on pharma marketing, Anbil says. He notes that many doctors now eschew sales reps in favor of insights about new drugs from health-oriented networks like Patients-LikeMe and Sermo.

Equally troubling is the average college marketing program’s lack of insight into Big Pharma’s new emphasis on forging deep, mutually beneficial partnerships with customers, says Bill Trombetta, a former antitrust litigator who is now a professor of healthcare and pharmaceutical marketing at St. Joseph’s University.

Instead of dangling tickets to a basketball game as an incentive to prescribe a drug, for example, more drug companies instruct

reps to find ways to bring value to a customer’s overall operation—an approach Trombetta calls Category Captain Management.

As early as 2007, Novartis implemented this concept in New England while marketing Diovan, its now off-patent blood pressure medication, Trombetta says. Sales reps there worked with doctors to help set up blood pressure screenings, and offered free talks

is on record as doing head-to-head studies as early as Phase I to weed out pipeline drugs that demonstrate they are no better than the gold standard,” Trombetta says.

“The metrics are turned upside down,” Trombetta explains. “It is not enough to focus on market share or sales growth. Rather, the channel captain takes on responsibility for the performance of its

Development and Licensing” and “Product Lifecycle Management” as part of every major pharmaceutical marketing education.

Trombetta says there’s a crying need for a basic course on pharma pricing. “Whenever I speak at conferences or give seminars on-site, I ask product managers and anyone in a strategic/marketing role, how would they arrive at a price for a new

For the career-minded student, courses explore new drivers

Given the number of trends and forces shaping the industry, a few elective courses geared to pharma marketing won’t cut it anymore. Students looking to get a leg up should seek out as many pharma-specific marketing courses as they can find that are taught by educators who are working at top-level pharma marketing jobs, educators say.



This may require students to go off-campus and attend specialty courses taught by top pharma executives. Partha Anbil (pictured), a consultant in IBM’s healthcare and life sciences practice, teaches such courses at Temple University’s Fox School of Business and the Hult International Business School; others are available at PharmaCourses.com.

At St. Joseph’s University, students will find pharma-marketing-oriented courses like “The Transition of How Healthcare Will Be Delivered,” says Bill Trombetta, a professor at the school. The school also offers an online course in “Marketing Foundation.” And a “Big Data” course explores the use of cloud computing and the new drive in pharma marketing to source disparate databases—i.e., data gleaned by different departments within an organization—to unearth new insights.

The “Smart Healthcare Consumer” class at St. Joe’s, taught by Janssen group product director Lisa Flaiz, makes participatory medicine and healthcare reform—two forward-looking issues—more accessible to students.

Matthew Perri III, who teaches at the University of Georgia, recommends his own courses—“Pharmaceutical Marketing” for undergraduates and “Healthcare Marketing” for grad students. Those courses have been several years in the making and are influenced by his active practice as a pharmacist, his academic research, and his work and consulting experience in pharmaceutical marketing.

for patients on the importance of controlling blood pressure.

But a marketing student looking for a future in pharma would be hard-pressed to learn about that trend in a typical college marketing course, Trombetta notes.

Matthew Perri III, a pharmacist by training who teaches at the University of Georgia, saw a similar “We’re your partner” approach taken by Novartis at a recent product introduction for schizophrenia drug Fanapt. “While I was presented with the basic clinical aspects of the drug, the major focus was on the pharmaco-economics,” he says.

Meanwhile, other companies looking to forge partnerships are working to avoid foisting “me-too” drugs on doctors already beleaguered with choices. “Shire

downstream customers.”

Put another way: “What if a drug or device company could become so valuable to its customers that the customer would not part ways with his ‘partner,’ not even for a low-ball price competitor?” Trombetta asks.

The solution for students? Enrolling in a respected program known for its emphasis on pharma marketing is a good start, the educators say. Not surprisingly, Trombetta is partial to St. Joe’s. Perri likes the University of Georgia, as well as the University of Mississippi. And Anbil, of course, recommends every place where he teaches (see sidebar).

In a perfect world, Anbil would love to see the creation of courses for college pharma marketing programs like “Pharma Business

drug, biologic, companion diagnostic, etc.,” Trombetta says. “It is like deer-in-the-headlights. The answer is to call in pricing gurus to provide an answer.”

And Perri is looking for much more depth in a course on pharma marketing research. “I’d really like to see a course that was truly pharmaceutical marketing research,” Perri says. “I’d know the difference because there is plenty of quantitative in the marketing research courses, but almost no qualitative research. Big Pharma uses qualitative research extensively for certain areas of marketing decision-making—especially early on.”

Adds Perri: “It’s not like selling Coke and Pepsi. Without industry-experienced faculty, there are going to be gaps in learning.” ■