

# A STUDY ON PRACTICES OF MEDICAL REPRESENTATIVES TO INFLUENCE SALES

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## ABSTRACT

Pharmaceutical marketing in India is highly relied on the relationship between medical representatives and medical practitioners. This has posed highly competitive and challenging work environment for medical representatives. This study is undertaken to study the overall practices and challenges faced by the medical representatives. The aim is to explore the process adopted by medical representatives and to review the daily routine procedures followed by them while meeting the medical practitioners. Data was collected by research method through survey questionnaire and analysed. From the study it is evident that there is significant association between the efforts taken by the medical representatives and the response they get from the medical practitioners. Thus the practices of Medical Representatives have a great part to bring in the sales.

**Keywords:** Medical Representatives, Medical prescribing, Selling skills.

## INTRODUCTION

Medical sales representatives are the key link between medical and pharmaceutical companies. They educate physicians and other medical practitioners on new developments in the rapidly advancing pharmaceutical industry. These professionals connect providers with the knowledge, drugs and treatments that can be offered to their patients. Excellent sales skills are a key requirement for medical representatives. Medical representatives use their medical knowledge and sales skills to convince physicians, pharmacists, hospitals and other health-care industry professionals that the products they're offering will be of great benefit to them.

According to WHO, promotion is defined as the informational and persuasive activities provided by the manufacturers and distributors with the aim to influence on prescribing, supply, purchase and use of medical drugs. Pharmaceutical promotion activities refers to activities of medical representatives and all other aspects of sales promotion e.g. journal and direct mail advertising; conference exhibitions participation, audio-visual materials usage, drug samples, gifts and hospitality for medical profession and seminars. For example, studies of Semin in 2006 showed opinion of respondent about a gift such as a medical device could influence prescribing.

## Review of literature

According to Caudill, T. S., Johnson, M. S., Rich, E. C., & McKinney, W. P. (1996), Frequency of use of information provided by pharmaceutical representatives and the group practice, may be associated with increased primary care physician prescribing costs. Roughead, E. E., Harvey, K. J., & Gilbert, A. L. (1998) states that Influential techniques were found to be commonly used by pharmaceutical representatives when they detailed products to medical practitioners. Hemminki E&Pesonen, T. (1977) analysed whether medical representatives work was more concerned with providing information or with selling, more with demand or with supply. It seems that companies regard detailing more as a sales activity than as public relations and concluded that drug detailing is neither necessary nor beneficial for the health services. Wazana, A. (2000) identifies the extent of physician and pharmaceutical industry interactions that appears to affect prescribing and professional behaviour and has impact on the knowledge and attitudes of physicians.

Lexchi.J, 1997 studied that sales representatives present only selected positive information about the products and physicians should compare the information they get from them with scientific publications. According to Alssageer, M. A., &Kowalski, S. R. (2012), Doctors believe that the provision of drug information by PCRs is incomplete and often exaggerated. Pharmaceutical companies should ensure that their representatives are trained to a standard to provide reliable information regarding the products they promote. Steinman, M. A., Shlipak, M. G., & McPhee, S. J. (2001) studied attitudes and practices among internal medicine housestaff and state that

Residents hold generally positive attitudes toward gifts from industry, but they are not influenced by them, and report behaviours that are often inconsistent with their attitudes. Oldani, M. J. (2004) examined the day-to-day activities of pharmaceutical salespersons, or drug reps, during the 1990s. He describes in detail the pharmaceutical gift cycle, a three-way exchange network between doctors, salespersons, and patients and how this process of exchange is currently in a state of involution.

Adair, R. F., & Holmgren, L. R. (2005) Studied whether access to drug samples influences resident prescribing decisions and found that Access to drug samples in clinic influences resident prescribing decisions. This could affect resident education and increase drug costs for patients. Zaki, N. M. (2014) analyses that The drug samples and printed educational materials are the most widely accepted gifts. Updating the physicians and pharmacists after graduation, as part of continued medical/pharmacy education, will eventually improve the healthcare professionals' capability to act to the patients' welfare. Brennan, T. A., Rothman, D. J., Blank, L., Blumenthal, D., Chimonas, S. C., Cohen, J. J., ... & Smelser, N (2006) relates Conflicts of interest between physicians' commitment to patient care and the desire of pharmaceutical companies and their representatives to sell their products pose challenges to the principles of medical professionalism. Workneh, B. D., Kassa, T. T., Dinkashe, F. T., Aregawi, T., Bayou, T. A., Gidey, M. T., & Belay, Y. B. (2017) found that the majority of physicians do not have a positive perception of generic medicines and a significant portion of the physician's belief brand medicines safer and effective than generic counterparts. The availability of medicines in pharmacies, low cost of medicines and purchasing power of the patients are major factors affecting generic medicines prescribing.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

1. To study the sales process adopted by Medical representatives in an organization at Chennai.
2. To review the daily routine procedure followed by the medical representatives while meeting the medical practitioners.
3. To understand the difficulties faced by the medical representatives while dealing with medical practitioners

### **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The study tries to cover the various practices adopted by the Medical Representatives and understand the relationship developed between the Medical Representatives and the Medical Practitioners.

### **LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

- Lesser duration of the study
- Only convenient sampling taken

### **Methodology**

The study is exploratory in nature. It involved a survey of medical representatives of an organization in Chennai. Data was collected by research method through survey questionnaire with thirty medical representatives for a period of two months from June to August 2017. The collected data was analysed using percentage analysis and chi square method in SPSS. A structured questionnaire of 15 multiple choice questions and demographic details were collected and analysed.

### **DATA COLLECTION**

#### **a. Primary data**

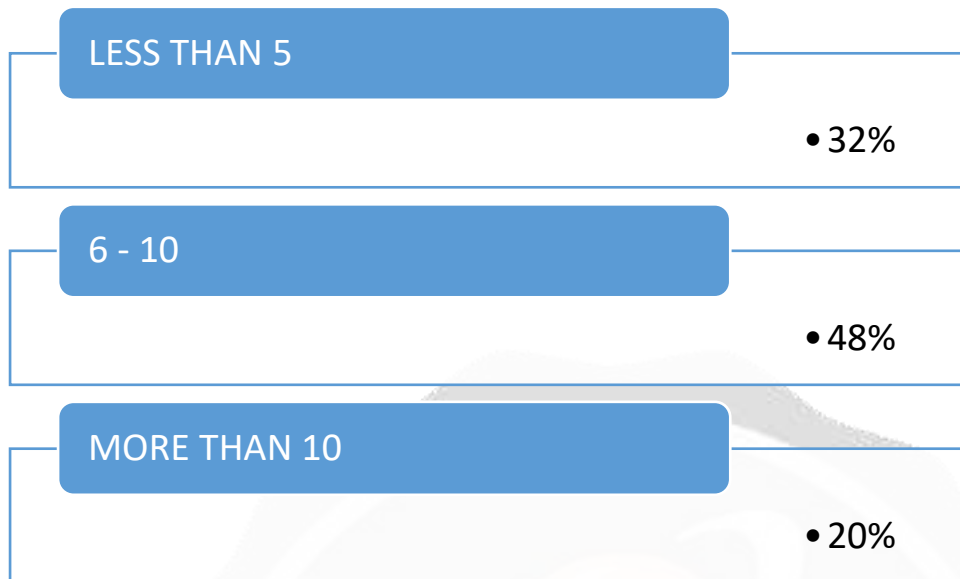
It is the first hand information, which is being collected by the researcher, or assistant is called primary data. In this study, the primary data was collected through structured questionnaire. Questionnaire was employed to collect the primary data from 30 respondents in the organization.

#### **b. Secondary data**

Besides the primary data, the secondary data was also collected for the study. Websites and books were referred for this purpose from the library to facilitate proper understating of the study

## DATA INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

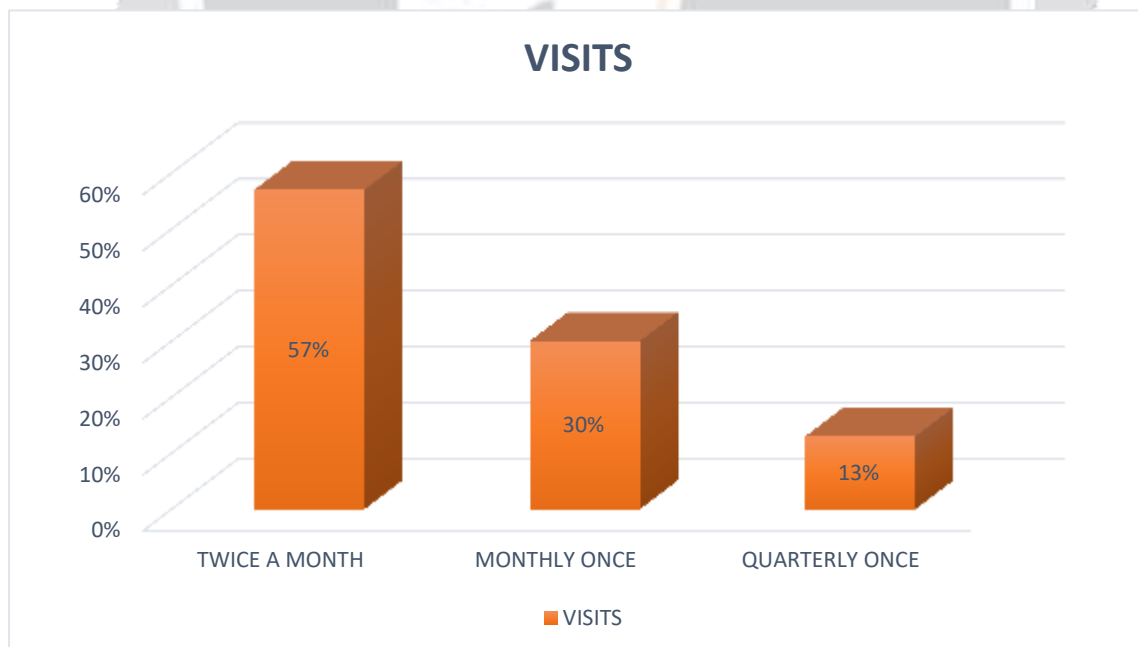
## 1. Average no. of medical practitioner visits per day



## INFERENCE

This includes individual practitioner visit per day and most of the respondents, around 48% fall into the 6-10 visits per day category whereas 32% of them were able to visit less than 5 practitioners per day and the rest 20% were able to visit more than 10 practitioners per day

## 2. Visiting a particular Medical practitioner



## INFERENCE

It states that majority of the Medical Representatives, around 57% of the population visit a particular practitioner twice in the same month whereas 30% of them visit once in a month and the rest 13% visit quarterly once. It has resulted such that more the number of visits, more is the sales call.

More no. of visits = more no. of sales call

### 3. Promotional offering

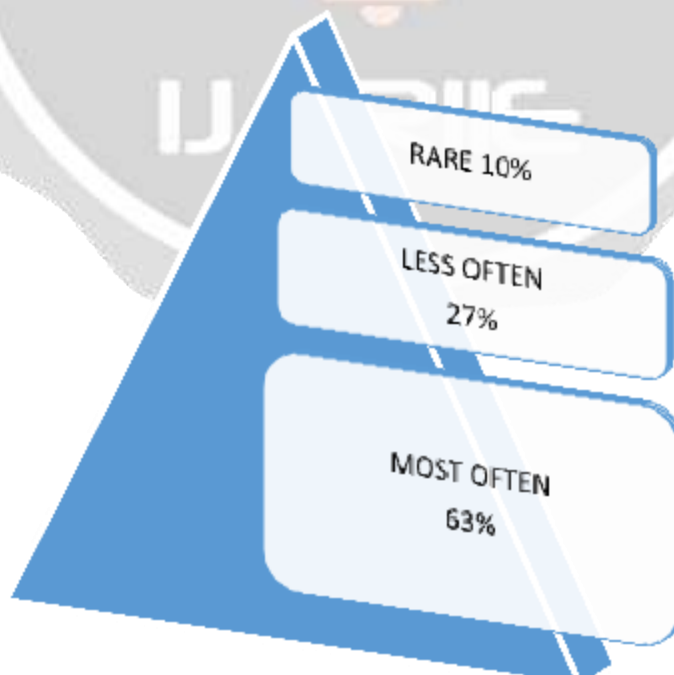


I

### INFERENCE

It is the usual practice of Medical representatives to greet the practitioners with some kind of offering and most of the time it is product reminders, almost 60% which is to remind them during prescription of drug. The next kind of offering is Hospital Discounts for specific hospital visits which is almost 27% and the rest 13% rely on gifts

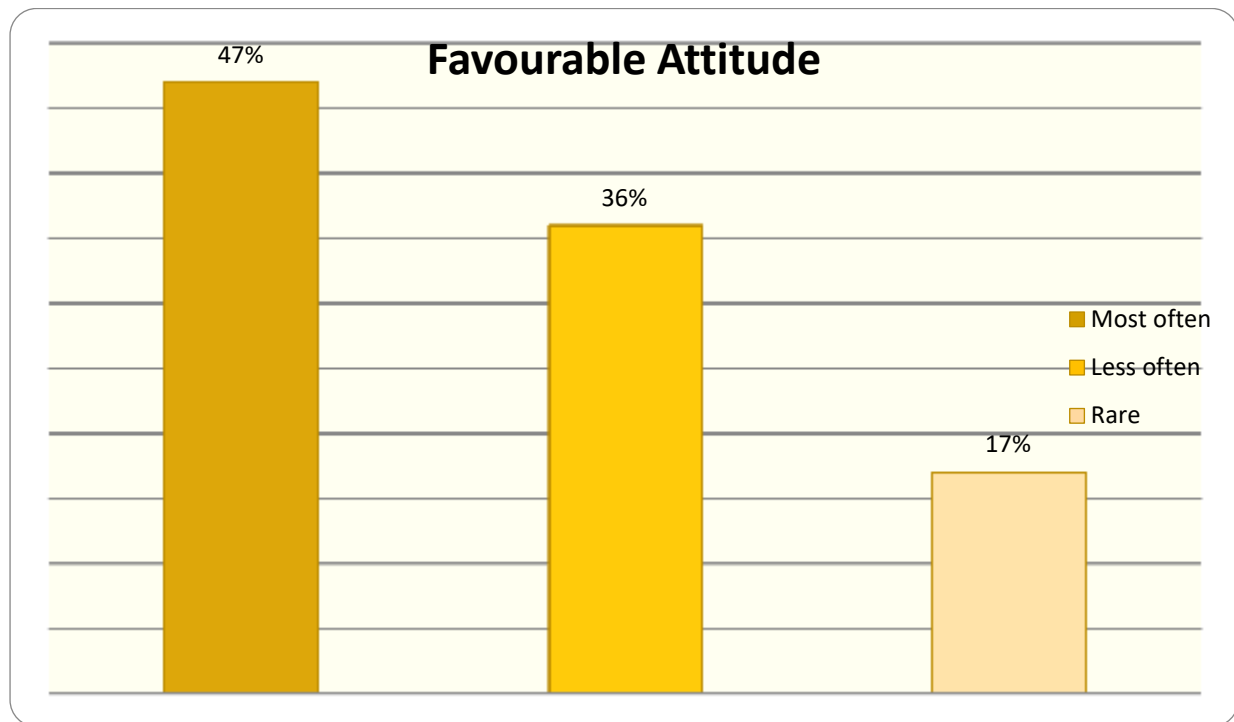
### 4. Preparing product details to be explained for each visit



### INFERENCE

As a result most of the medical representatives had prepared the product details for each visit. Almost 63% of the medical representatives more often prepare whereas 27% of medical representatives occasionally take the full details and 10% take very rarely

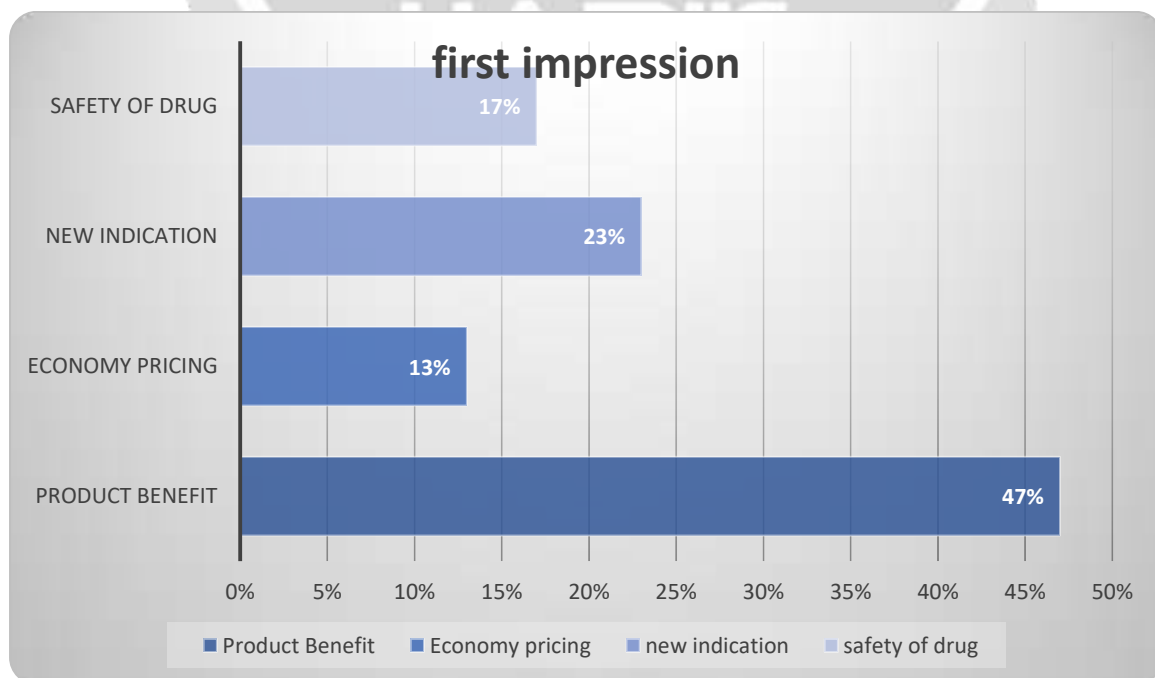
#### 5. Favourable attitude during constant visit



#### Inference:

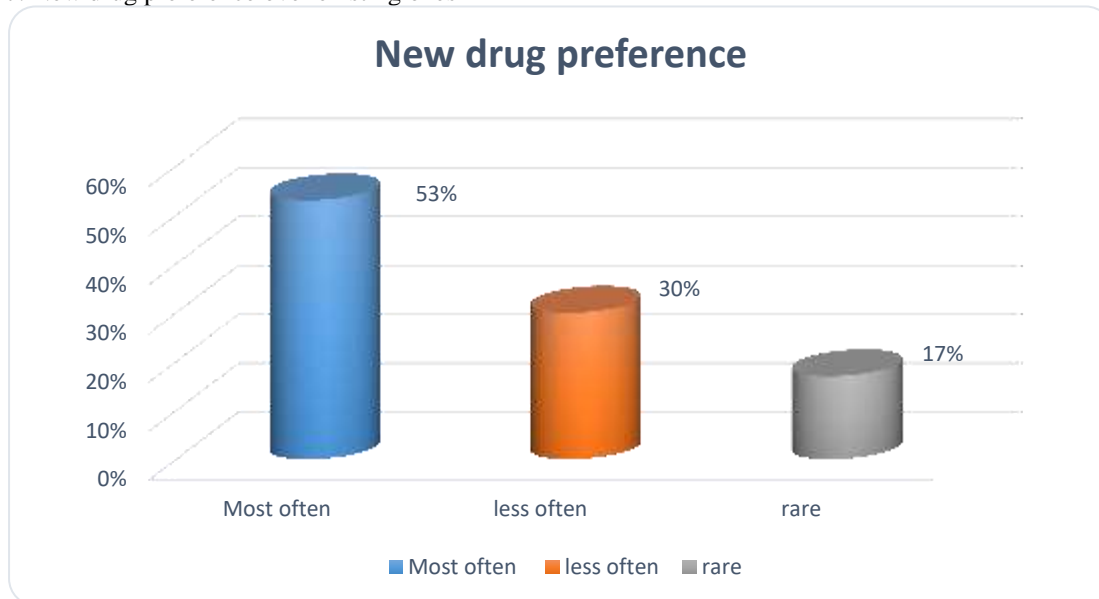
Half of the respondents (47%) have reported to have felt positive attitude during their constant visit whereas 36% have occasionally felt the same. But the rest 17% have rarely felt so.

#### 6. First impression about the product

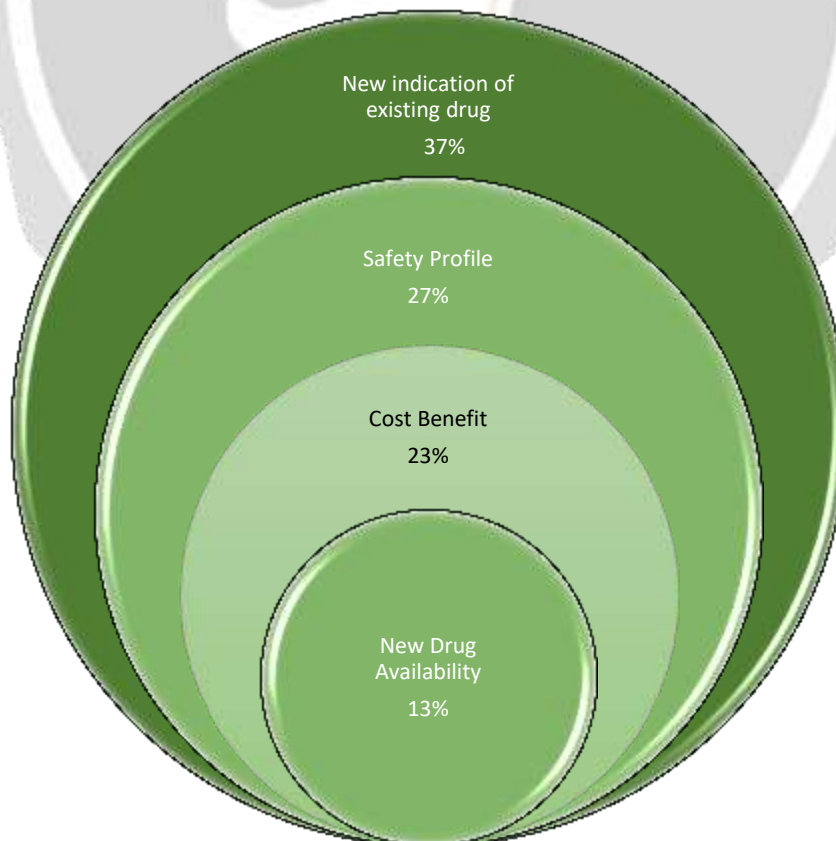


**Inference:**

The first impression about the drug is mostly by the product benefit (47%) then the new indication of the same drug (23%) and then by safety of drug (17%) and finally by economy pricing (13%).

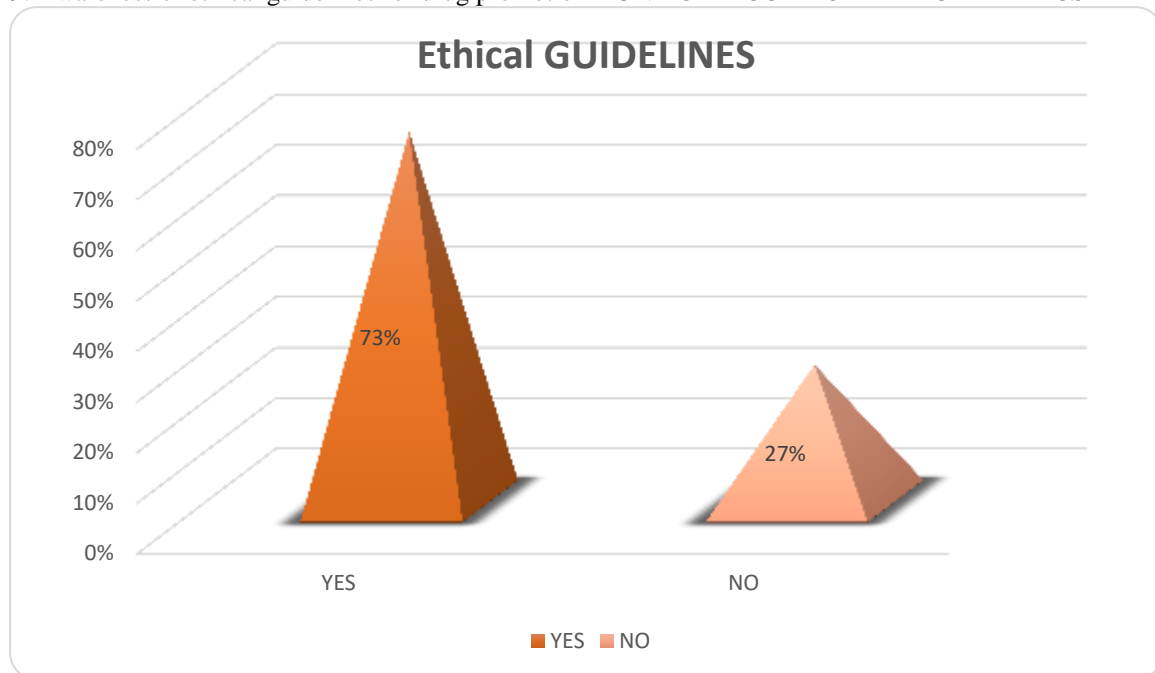
**7. New drug preference over existing ones****INFERENCE:**

53% of respondents states that a new drug is most often preferred over an existing one where as 30% state the preference of the new drug is less often done and 17% state that the preference is rare.

**8. Criteria focussed to describe****INFERENCE**

Most of the representatives around 37% choose to describe about the new indication of an existing drug since it is more reliable. 27% of the population talk about safety profile whereas 23% about the cost benefit. About new drug availability only 13% of population take chance of explaining.

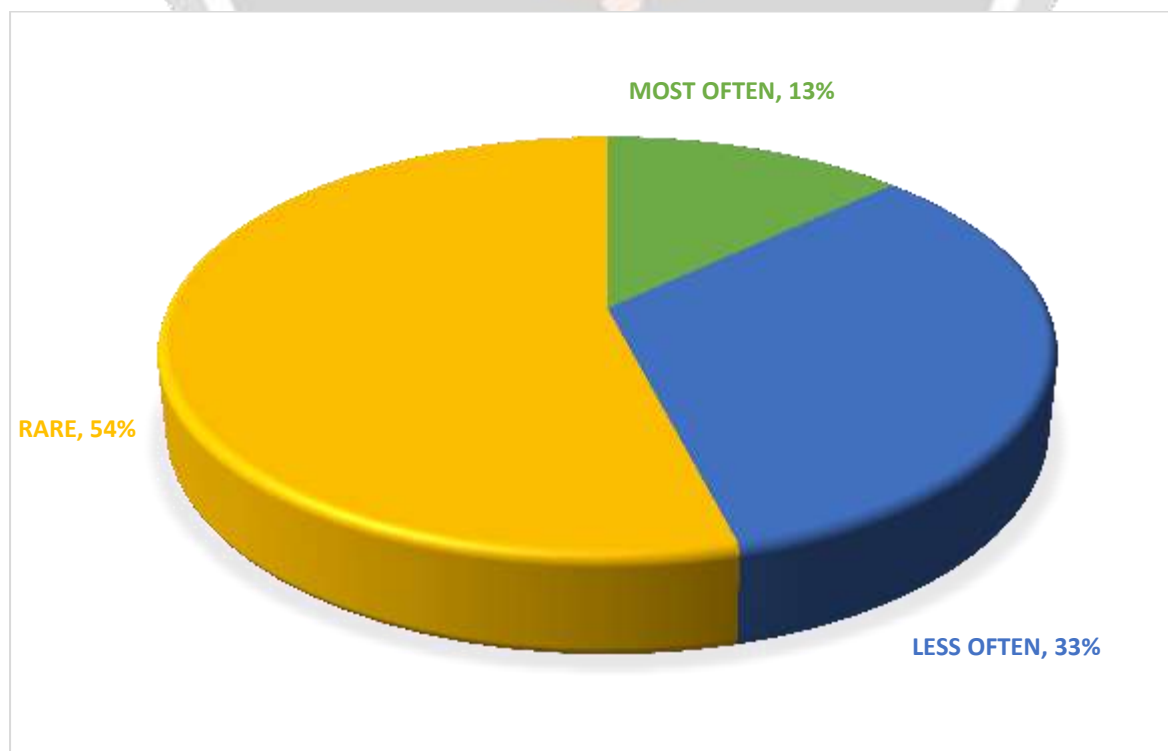
#### 9. Awareness of ethical guidelines for drug promotion – UNIFORM CODE OF MEDICAL ETHICS



#### INFERENCE

It is stated that 73 percent of population are widely aware of medical ethics of drug promotion whereas 27 percent are not so aware of it.

#### 10. Medical Practitioner approached outside the working premises



## INFERENCE

Study states that only 13% of medical representatives most often meet the practitioner out of working premises whereas 33% state that it is not a common practice but depends on the relationship between them whereas 54% state they do not meet outside.

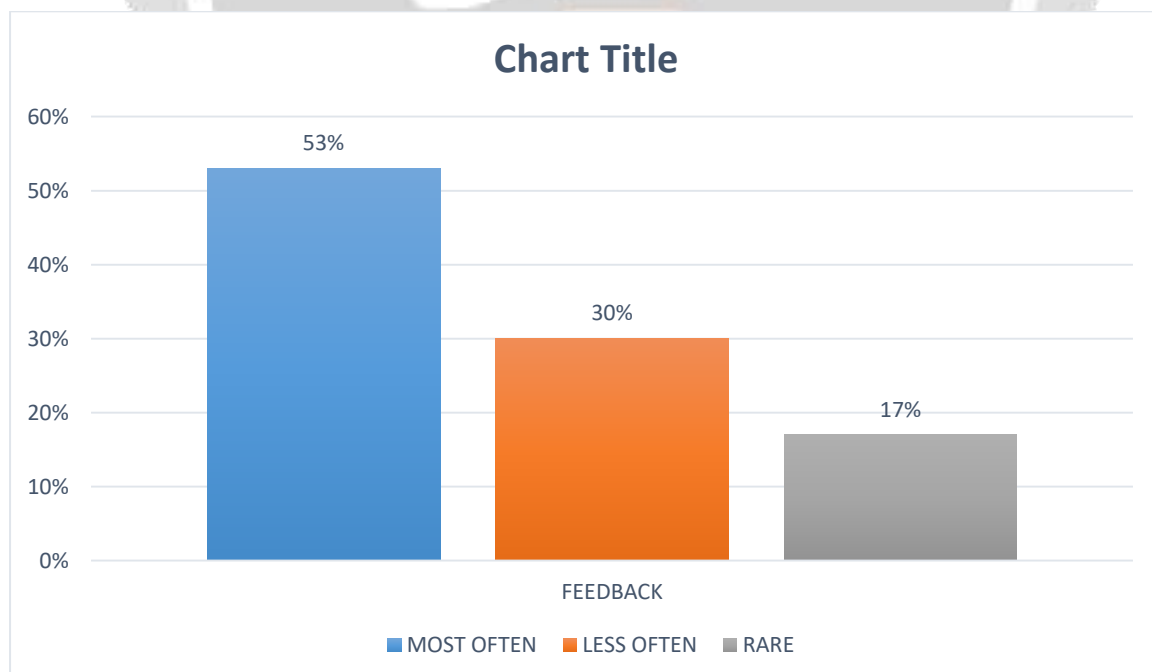
### 11. Success Mantra



## INFERENCE

Attitude of Medical Representatives has been the most important success mantra given by 43%. Then comes the Effective leadership by 24% and Product features by 20%. Finally long term relationship by 10%. Thus Attitude is the major point to be focussed.

### 12. Feedback Approach



## INFERENCE

Feedbacks from the practitioners are followed by 53% who communicate to the managers and ensure the necessary steps taken whereas 30% less often do that. And the rest 17% rarely focus on feedbacks.



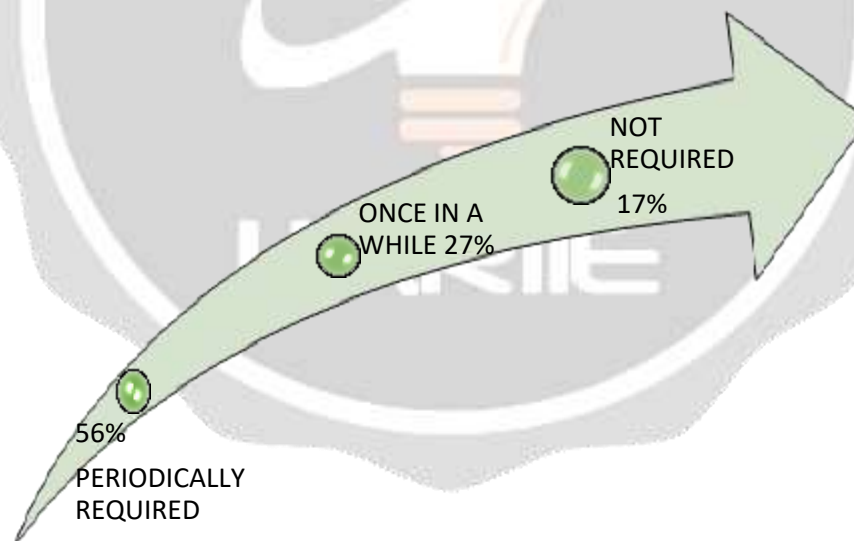
### 13. Key success factor to be aware of during hospital visits



#### INFERENCE

The factor most probably to be aware of during hospital visit is the thorough knowledge about the product as reported by 40% Medical Representatives. 27% focus on detailing the drug whereas 20% focus on regularity and the rest 13% concentrate on attitude to be maintained during the visit.

### 14. Need for training on Pharmaceutical sales.



#### EXPERIENCE



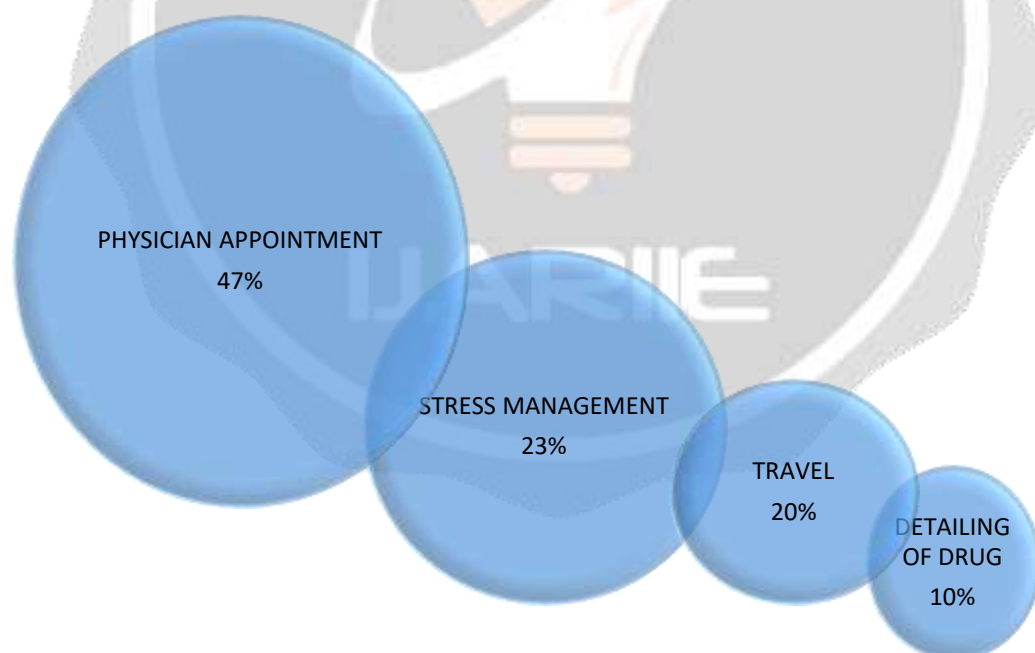
#### INFERENCE

More than half of the population (56%) prefer periodic training whereas 27% require it at times only. The rest 17% say they do not rely on any kind of training and most of them are much experienced and elderly ones. The age of medical representative seems to be a significant factor in regard to the need for training.

#### 15. Major Challenge Faced by Medical Representatives.

##### Inference

The major challenge for most of the Medical Representatives i.e. 47% of them is to get the appointment of the Medical Practitioner whereas 23% report about stress management due to the nature of work and 20% feel travel to be problematic one. Only 10% feel that detailing of the drug is a challenging one.



#### CHI SQUARE ANALYSIS USING SPSS - TWO FACTOR ANALYSIS

##### 1.AGE - CHALLENGES TABLE -1

Inference: It is evident that there is significant association between the Age of the medical representatives and the challenges faced by them.

	CHALLENGE				Total
	Detailing of drug	Stress management	Travel	Physician Appointment	
20-30	3	0	0	8	11
31-40	0	0	2	6	8
41-50	0	4	4	0	8
More than 50	0	3	0	0	3
Total	3	7	6	14	30

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2 sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	34.221 <sup>a</sup>	9	.000
Likelihood Ratio	41.864	9	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.195	1	.041
N of Valid Cases	30		

## 2.EXPERIENCE \* TRAINING NEED Cross tabulation

	TRAINING NEED			Total
	PERIODICALLY REQUIRED	ONCE IN A WHILE REQUIRED	NOT REQUIRED	
1-10	14	0	0	14
11-20	3	6	0	9
MORE THAN 20	0	2	5	7
Total	17	8	5	30

Chi-Square Table 2

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	35.042 <sup>a</sup>	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	38.544	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	22.848	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	30		

Inference: Thus it is evident that there is significant association between the years of experience of the medical representatives and the Need for training.

### 3.FREQUENCY OF VISIT AND FAVOURABLE ATTITUDE

		FAVOURABLE ATTITUDE			Total
		Most Often	Less Often	Rare	
FREQUENT VISITS	Twice a Month	14	3	0	17
	Monthly Once	0	8	1	9
	Quarterly Once	0	0	4	4
Total		14	11	5	30

Chi-Square Test Table 3

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	40.210 <sup>a</sup>	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	39.207	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	23.018	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	30		

Inference: Thus it is evident that there is significant association between the frequency of visit of the medical representatives and the favourable attitude towards them.

### DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

A Medical representative is generally considered as a sales person. But they are the one who convey knowledge of recent trends in medical diagnostic and treatment to the doctors. Once a professional in Pharmaceutical Industry said, "MR is acting as sales persons and even few of them working like postman. If MR needs to elevate respect in Doctors clinic they must be Basket of knowledge". True to this 40% of the respondents have chosen the right product knowledge as the success factor to be aware of while 27% say that the right detailing of the product will influence sales to a greater extent.

There exists a myth that pharmaceutical companies offer gifts which is a kind of bribe to the practitioners that creates an act in response. But it is not so. Most of the respondents offer product reminders that are useful and remind them about the uniqueness of product as a symbol of brand recall.

The major challenge faced by a medical representative is getting appointment of the practitioner [47%]. They are not always welcomed though they are reliable source of information regarding the new drug or the new indication of existing drug. To fix an appointment, to confirm the timing, to travel, to wait for his chance and then to describe the product benefit, pricing, safety and to get a call from the chemist is a tedious job. It is evident according to most of the Medical Representatives the first impression about the drug to the practitioner is by the product benefit [47%] then new indication [23%] and then by safety profile which is [17%]. It is good to know that the least preference is for economy pricing [13%] which means quality standards are into practice.

The Right attitude and regular visits plays a vital role that aids in gaining potential customers and by regularity, effective communication, product knowledge, detailing they win the task.

For each visit there is preparation of product details by the medical representatives and most of them focus on detailing the new indication of an existing drug rather than the safety profile and cost benefits. Getting

appointment of the medical practitioner is found to be the major challenge and building relationship is the success mantra. Experienced representatives maintain smooth relationship that aids in more yield per doctor.

Junior representatives aspire for periodic training whereas experienced ones do not rely on it. Thus years of experience of medical representative are inversely proportional to the need for training.

Thus the role of Medical Representatives, their practices with the right product and their constant efforts boosts up their relationship with practitioners which in turn influence sales .

## SUGGESTIONS:

The younger Representatives find it more difficult to get the appointment of Medical Practitioner whereas the experienced Medical Representatives could manage appointments and yield per doctor ratio is high. The younger Representatives must be rewarded with incentives for their efforts and the senior representative's performance should be recognised and motivated by family health insurance schemes and recreational activities. Periodic Training should be given to younger Representatives.

## Conclusion

From the study it is evident that Medical Representatives make a thorough analysis of the Medical Practitioner and there is significant association between the efforts taken by the medical representatives and the response they get from the medical practitioners. Thus the practices of Medical Representatives have a great part to bring in the sales. They ensure that their personal aspects like attitude, communication and regularity boosts up the relationship in order to get maximum sales. Thus it is true that practices of Medical Representatives influence sales to a certain extent. A further qualitative about the challenges faced by medical representatives is required in this dynamic environment.

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