



Brand  
**Innerworld**

Inside the World of Healthcare Brands

**Understanding  
HCPs:  
COVID 19 Perspective**

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# Foreword

The healthcare ecosystem has witnessed a sea change in the past few months. It changed the way Patients, Doctors and Pharma companies interacted with each other.

The initial phase of lockdown witnessed knee jerk reactions. Pharma companies and their large field force tried to reach out to the HCPs in every possible way, only to get pushed back by the doctors. While some companies succeeded in fruitfully engaging their customers, others failed miserably.

As the economy started opening up and the lockdown is easing, many companies have sent their sales force in the field. Yet making mandated sales calls has not been easy. Many doctors are refusing to see Reps. The fear of infection is prohibiting doctors from meeting MRs. Those who are allowing MRs to visit are not ready to listen to any detailing story. A representative is expected to mention the brands and leave without opening the folder or giving out samples.



Yet, getting the ultra-limited time with HCPs is not a new thing. Doctors were showing lesser and lesser interest in the traditional way of interacting with pharma companies. COVID 19 only accelerated that feeling amongst the doctors. There is an urgent need to revisit the traditional model of interacting with doctors.

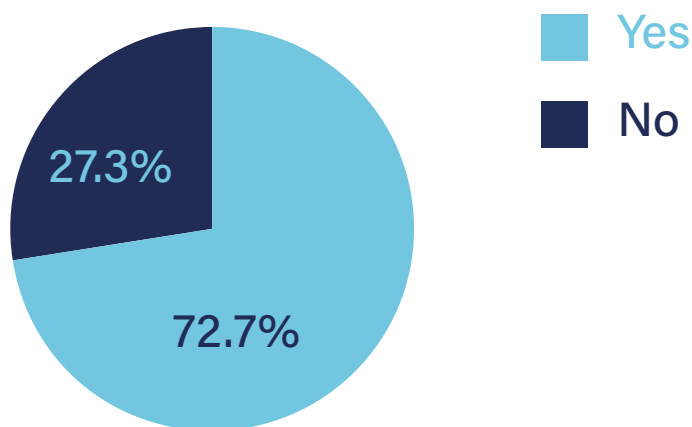
We at the Brand Innerworld tried to understand the opinions of the doctors on their interactions with representatives during the lockdown. How could they have got improved? If companies wish to continue the model of Physical and Digital, what should they keep in mind for the fruitful engagements?

We carried out an insight mining study amongst 35 doctors from various specialties and cities. The idea was to understand their feelings and reasons behind those feelings by talking to doctors over 30 to 40 minutes

**Here is a snapshot of our study.**

# HCP-MR interactions before COVID 19

**Were you interacting with Medical Representatives (MRs) regularly before COVID 19 crisis happened?**



There is a significant number of doctors who stopped meeting MRs regularly even before the COVID 19. Though the most common reason sighted by them was lack of time, on further discussing this point, it became evident that these doctors did not feel the need to make time for MRs.

**“MRs definitely can’t be on our priority list. I might as well spend more time with my family”**

**Pediatrician**

**“If I ask MR something, they SAY I will get back, but never in reality. Their bosses at times are better in responding, so I meet their bosses.”**

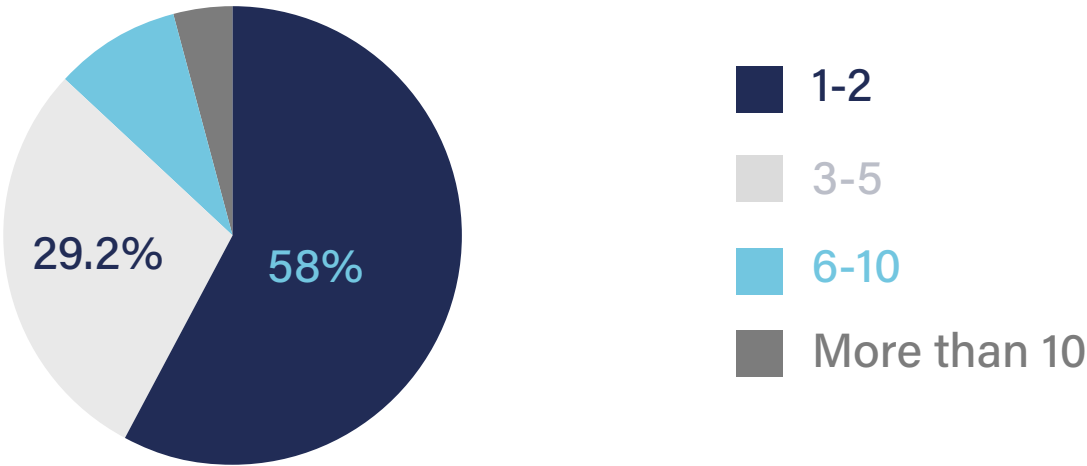
### **Otorhinolaryngologist**

These doctors were largely metro based, relatively younger and had specialized practice. They did have multi-location practice.

Yet, 73% of the doctors did meet MRs regularly. There was a mix of metro and non-metro doctors. They felt that meeting representatives was an integral part of their practice. Meeting MRs was more of a habit. When probed on if they were happy their interactions with MRs? The response was, “Not really.”

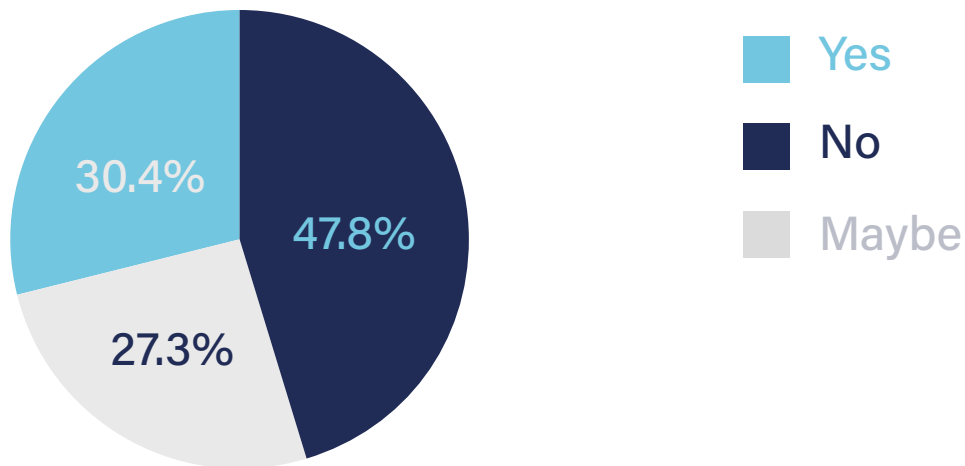
# What was the attitude of HCPs towards MRs before COVID 19?

How many MRs on average did you meet each day before COVID 19 crisis?



Over 58 % of the doctors met 1-2 MRs a day. Yet, the reasons differed. While a section of the doctors met 1-2 MRs because only 1-2 visited them, others restricted the number so that they get more time for the other activities.

## Were you considering reducing your access to the MRs in the past few years?



The majority of the doctors were thinking of reducing access to MRs even before the COVID 19. Yet, many admitted that they might not do it in reality.

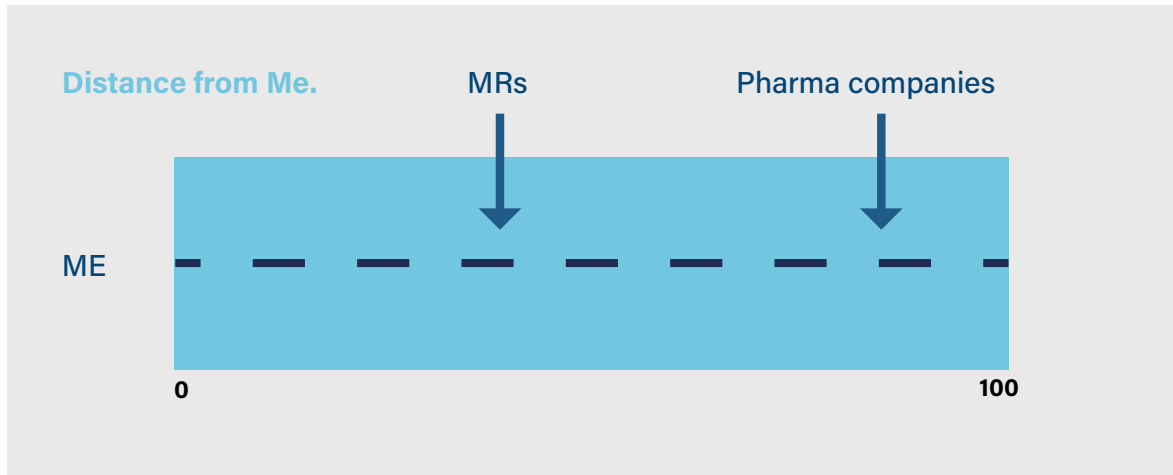
**“I feel sorry for MRs. They have a lot of tensions from their companies.”**

**General Practitioner**

To understand the relationships doctors share with the Reps, we asked a question based on the projective technique. How distant do you feel from a pharma company and the same company’s MR? The doctor showed significant closeness to MRs compared to their companies.



## How distant do you feel from pharma companies and MRs?



“MRs are nice, enthusiastic, young boys and girls but are pressurized by their companies. I feel sorry for them. They wait for hours for us, don’t feel it’s right to deny entry to them but would like to reduce the number.”

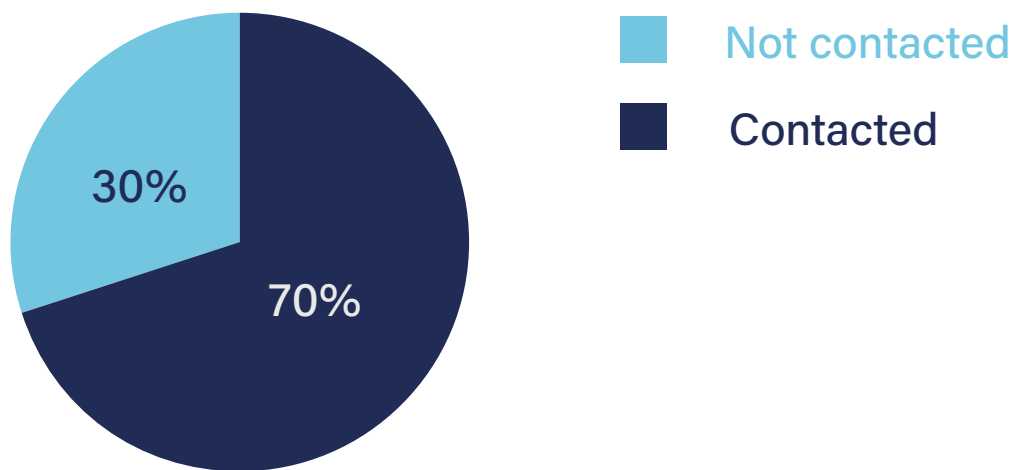
### General practitioner

“I tell MRs if your company’s products are of high quality and affordable to my patients, I will prescribe them. Just tell me the name of one product and I will support you. Don’t tell me to prescribe two or more products. I want to help everyone. I will not deny entry to them.”

### Consulting Physician

# Were all the HCPs reached out to?

**Did the Pharma companies contact you during the lockdown?**



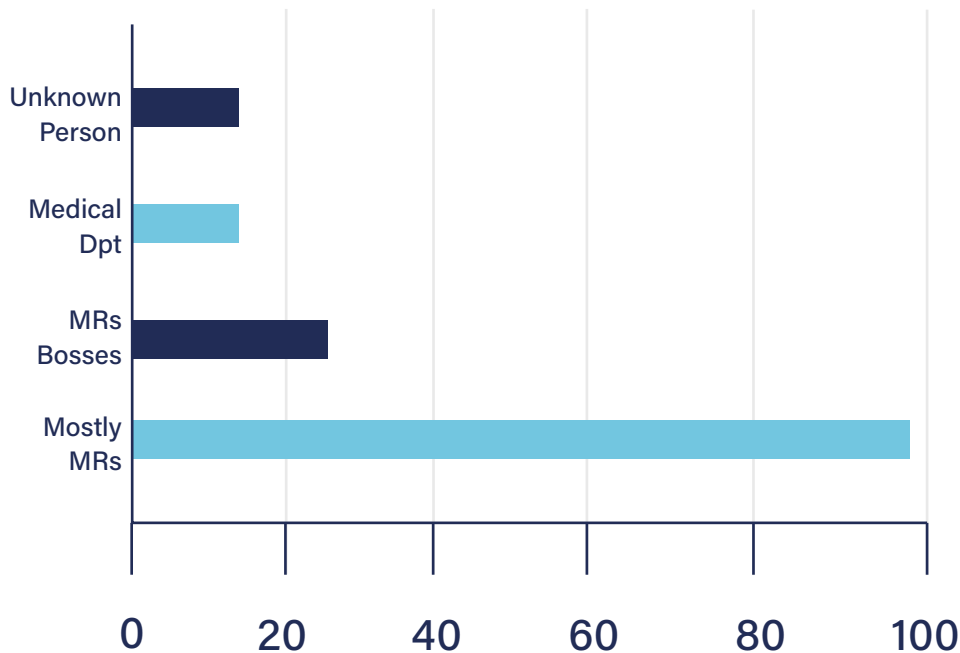
To understand the nature and quality of interactions during the pandemic, we asked doctors about the experience. 30% of the doctors were not contacted by any company during the lockdown. They comprised mainly of hospital or multi-location-based doctors and those who were not meeting MRs on a regular basis.

When asked if they had shared their mobile numbers with MRs in the past, they responded negatively.

**“I do not share personal number with anyone including patients. I see no reason as they can contact the hospital desk for any urgent need.”**  
**Urologist & Genitourinary surgeon.**

# Who contacted the HCPs during the lockdown? Who did the doctors prefer?

## Who contacted you from the company?

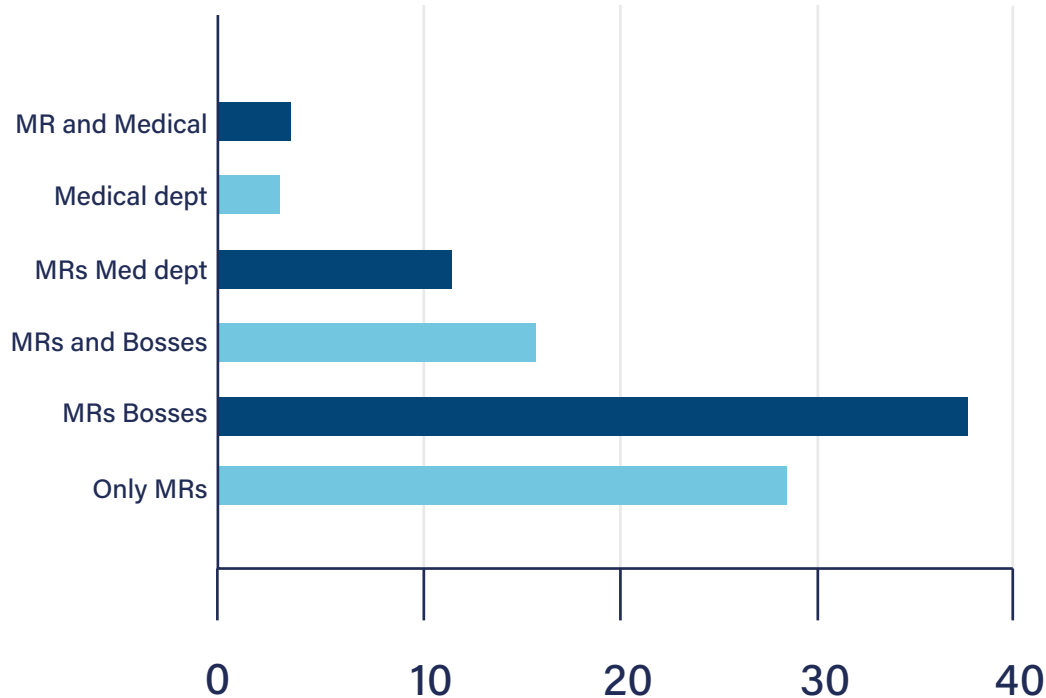


Mostly MRs contacted the doctors during the lockdown. Yet it was difficult for them to remember who called as they rarely know MRs by names.

**“I link the face of MRs to Brands. I know them as Clamp MR or Ascoril MR, when I see them, I remember the brand.”**

**Pediatrician**

## Who would you have preferred interacting with during the lockdown?



Most doctors had more time on hand during the lockdown and would have loved to interact with MR's bosses in anticipation of more enriching interactions.

**" We generally tell MRs to mention the brand names and leave, but during the lockdown, if any senior person with proper product and therapy knowledge wants to interact, I would be interested."**

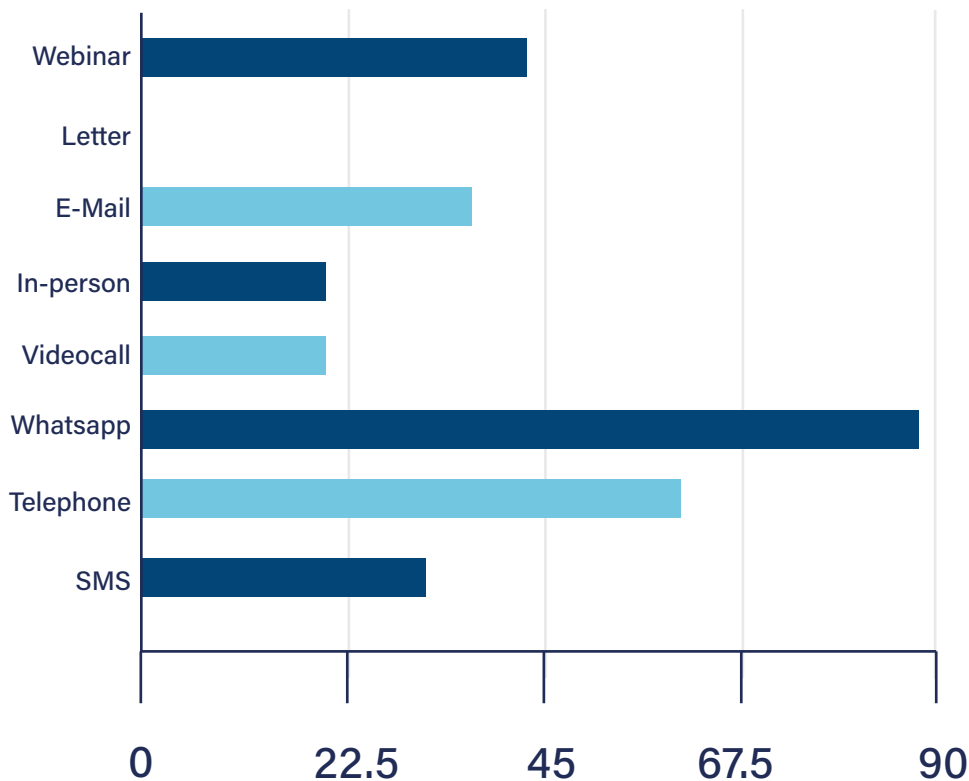
**Gynaecologist**

Even the doctors who were reluctant to see MRs regularly in the Pre COVID times were willing to give time to senior persons from the company.

**The reason: Seniors or bosses don't detail, they converse.**

# How did Companies Reach out to Doctors?

## How Did Companies Reach out to you?



What's App (WA) was the most used and liked medium for interaction. WA was preferred as it is a non-intrusive medium and allows different formats of interactions. SMS or text messages were less preferred due to lack of flexibility with the format. Though telephone was also commonly used as a medium for interaction, a smaller number of doctors in reality preferred it

Though initially doctors enjoyed webinar, they soon got overwhelmed with invitations. The reasons typically fall in three categories.

**Too many invitations:** “ I can’t practically attend so many webinars. For a given hour there are more than three invitations”.

**Physician Cardiologist**

**Low priority topic:** “There was a webinar on children’s cough. I didn’t think it was important. What more are they going to tell me about children’s cough?”

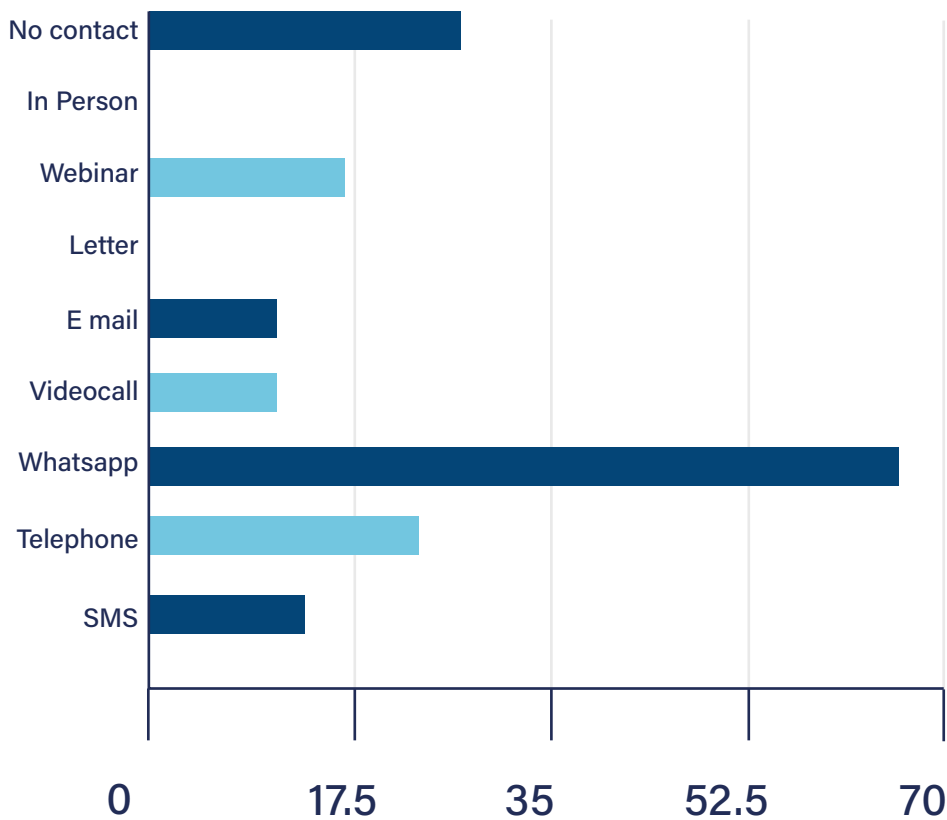
**Pediatrician**

**Unimpressive panel:** “There have been so many webinars. I look at the Panelists and decide if I should join.”

**Physician**

# What is HCPs preference of Medium?

## Which Medium You Would have preferred?



Around 30% of the doctors desired no contact with pharma companies. Yet, the reasons differed significantly. While the section of the doctors felt that it was an intrusion in their private time, another section felt that since they could not help pharma companies by way of prescription during the lockdown, the companies need not waste time talking to them.



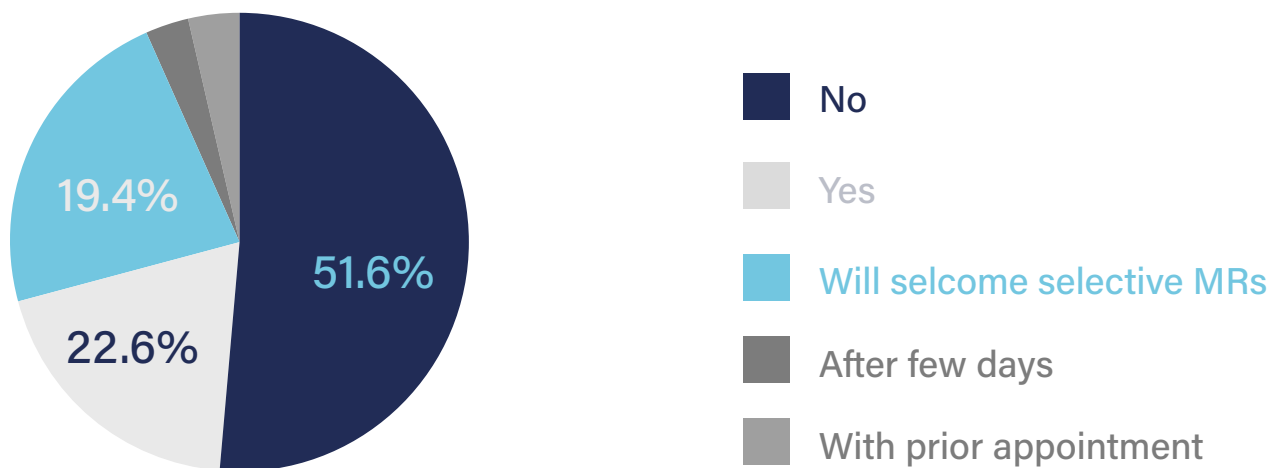
**“How can we help a pharma representative, if I am not seeing the patients? What is the point in talking to me?”**

**General Practitioner.**

This reaction appears to have come from the fact that most interactions were around brand reminders, which often ended in ‘Prescription Requests’ .

# Are the MRs welcome in the clinic?

Now the lockdown is easing, would you welcome MRs to your clinics/OPDs?



Only 22 % of the doctors were ready to welcome MRs on easing of the lockdown. 71 % mentioned that either they will not allow MRs or will be very selective about whom they will allow. The fear of infection was the main reason behind this thinking.

**“We can’t afford to crowd our clinics anymore. Our current priority is our patients”**

**Gastroenterologist.**

**“MRs go to so many places, they can easily get infected and spread the infection further. I don’t understand why pharma companies are risking their and our lives.”**

### **Pediatrician**

Those 23% who were ready to welcome MR were mainly from smaller towns like Sangli, Dule, Firozabad. The reasons why they would welcome MRs varied.

**“MRs are an integral part of our Practice.”**

### **Gynaecologist**

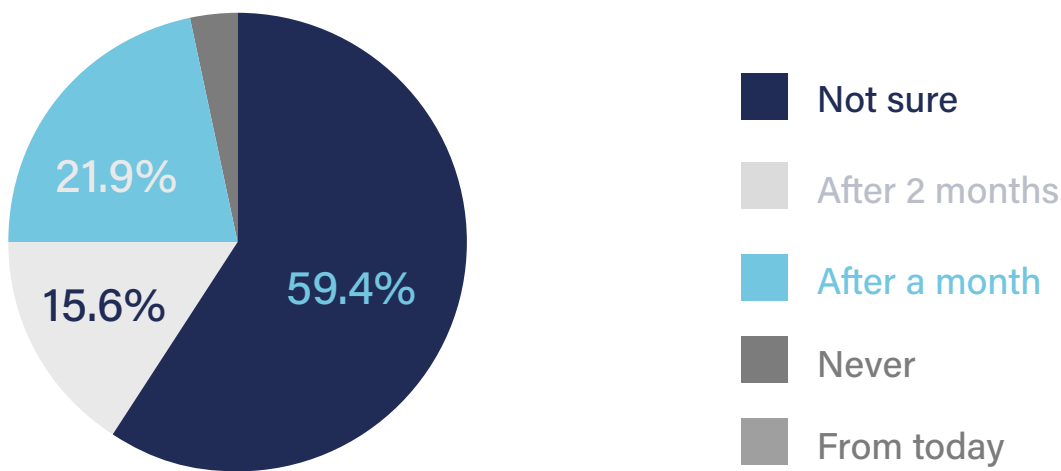
**“MR’s return to our clinics gives us a feeling of normalcy”**

### **Physician**

Those who mentioned that they would allow a selected few were those with heavy patient loads. These doctors were from gynecology and pediatric specialty. Since they had to continue working despite lockdown, they needed help. A few MRs/ companies helped them managing patients, sanitizing clinics. These MRs would always be welcome.

# What is their advice for the pharma companies?

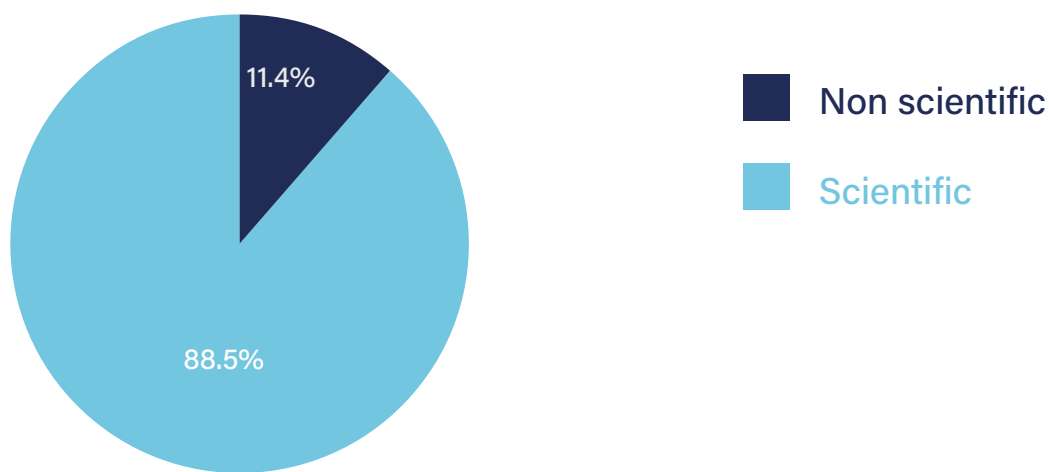
## When do you think MRs should start visiting in person?



60% of the doctors are not sure when is the right time to meet MRs. Many looked at COVID 19 as a long-term problem and felt it is not worth risking lives by meeting MRs in person. Many are open for remote engagements, but “Only if they have something significant to say or show. This is not the time to risk lives just to sell your products.”

# What kind of engagements are HCPs open for?

## What Kind of Engagement would be preferred?

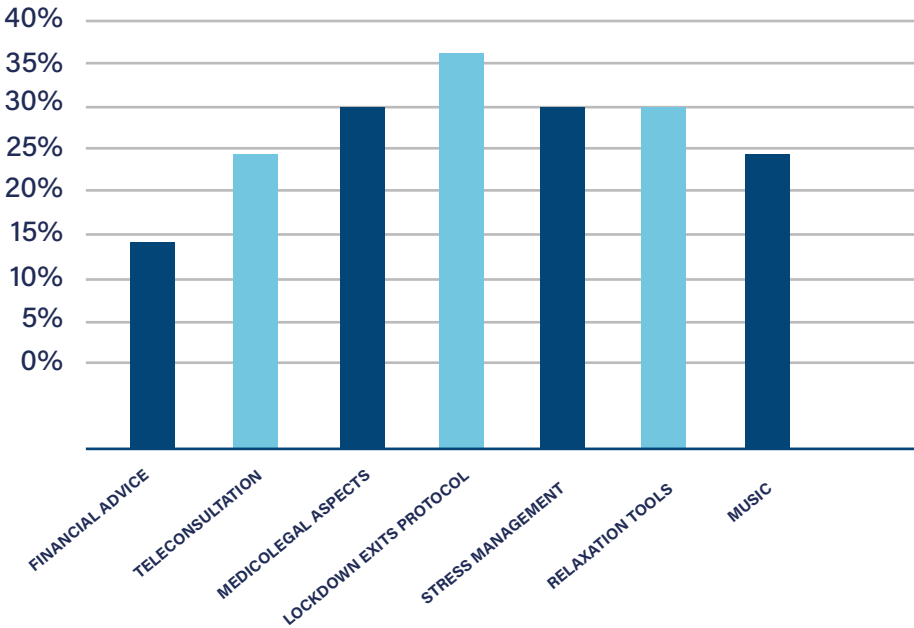


89% of the respondents preferred scientific engagement with pharma companies. More information on drugs, therapies and advancements in treatments were the areas of interest. They also wished to receive more information on patient types. Yet, on further discussion, doctors showed interest in non-scientific areas. When asked which Non-Scientific topics would they be interested in, a clear preference emerged.

# What are Non-Scientific subjects of interest?

Stress management and relaxation techniques were the most sought after needs of the HCPs. The medical fraternity has been undergoing huge stress for a while and COVID 19 has only accelerated that need.

## Non Scientific Engagement



Increased demands from the patients, pressures on delivering better health and patient outcomes, burgeoning medical information, need for medical skills development, managing staff , salaries and finances are some of the many pressures felt by the doctors.

Another non-scientific topic that scored high was lockdown exit policies.

**“Though the associations are guiding us, we are still looking for some answers.”**

### **Ophthalmologist**

There was confusion amongst doctors regarding the precautions to be taken. The feeling was that there was no authentic source of information.

Knowledge on e-consultation, technology platform and digital proficiency was another set of non-scientific interests.

# What precise role can pharma companies play to help the medical fraternity?



**Basic:** Make the medicines available. In the initial part of the lockdown, HCPs received calls from the patients if a particular medicine was not available. So, primarily doctors expressed the need for knowing availability of particular products of pharma companies so that they could guide the patients accordingly.



**Advanced:** Doctors need PPEs, Masks, surface sanitizers on regular basis. Since all the doctors in a given area have similar requirements, they wondered if any company could aggregate the demand from a given area and get bulk discounts and regular supply for doctors.

“Now we are getting masks, but there was a time when I had only three masks. I would wear one on a very critical day, take it out as soon as I reached home and preserve it for the next use with a minimum gap of 6 days. How I wished I had more masks !!!”

**Pediatrician**

**Super Advanced:** Though not expressed in many words, the HCPs need partners in delivering health outcomes. With increasing demand and expectations from the medical fraternity, they always needed help, COVID 19 has only increased this need.

During the pandemic, patients avoided meeting doctors.

“If someone had assured risk-free transfer to my patients, in a sanitized vehicle, it would have been a great help.”

**Oncologist**

**“All we wanted was to treat our patients without infecting them or getting infected. We needed help; virtual or real.”**

**Physician**

**“Now we need help for giving appointments, avoid crowding, educating patients on basic COVID rules. My staff is overwhelmed. If anyone ready to help, I will welcome.”**

**Orthopedic**

**“As a responsible orthodontist, I want to send regular information to my patients who are undergoing treatment but can't see me. I have my patients' numbers, but I don't have knowledge, time and energy to keep doing so.”**

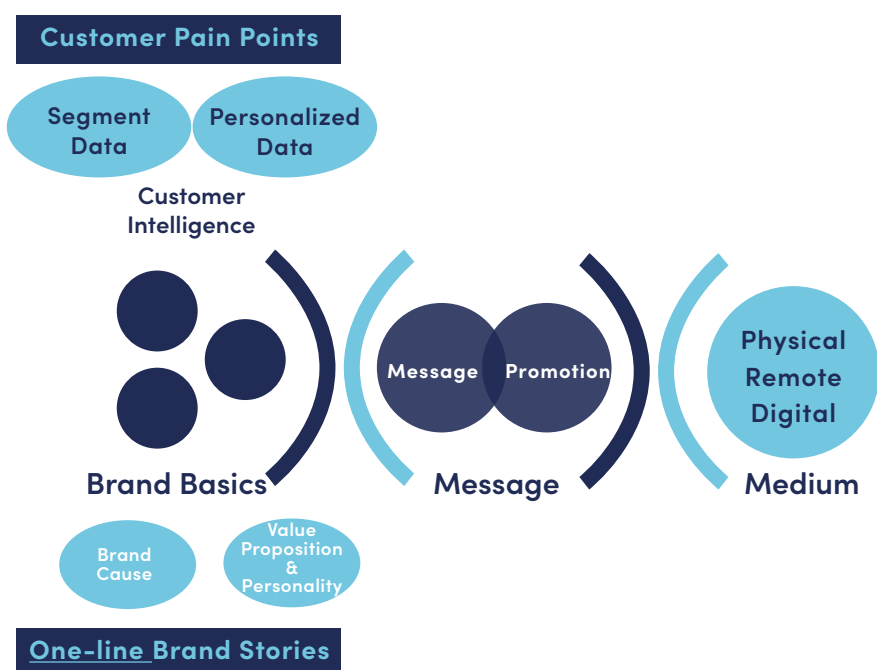
**Orthodontist**

# Our take

The medical fraternity is undergoing tremendous pressures of practice. Increased patients' expectations, need for ensuring patient satisfaction and health outcomes, keeping up with ever-increasing medical information, latest technology, managing finances related to practice; the list is endless. The pandemic and fear of infection have only added a new dimension to these tensions.

HCPs don't want pharma companies to add to these pressures by making unwanted calls, personally, remotely or digitally. Yet, any interaction that can aid in reducing HCPs' stress is welcome.

If the HCPs see value in what brands message, the medium becomes secondary.



HCPs are looking for partnerships. Though they are not necessarily expecting it from the pharma companies, there exists a need that can be fulfilled by healthcare companies.

Yet, for the business's survival and growth, pharma companies need to bring HCPs' attention to brands. In an attempt to establish partnerships with HCPs, they cannot lose the brand focus. A brand that is out of mind is often, out of prescription.

Hence for fruitful engagement with HCPs, brands need to create content/ promotion keeping HCPs', patients' needs and the brand basics. Only after the right message is arrived at, the medium can be decided.

## The pandemic has reminded the marketers of Five Key Concepts of partnerships keeping 5 C's in mind.

**1. Customer Intelligence:** What are my customers' pain points, and can I partner to ease them? Can we have the personalized customer intelligence to understand a person behind a professional? Can this data be centralized instead of it staying in the minds of the Reps?

**2. Cause:** What cause is the brand championing? What is the Customer value proposition? What is the personality of the brand? How can brands develop one-line stories that can fulfill brand objectives?

**3. Contextual & Customized Content:** Today, data can help us understand the person behind the profession in real time? What is the context from which the HCP is operating today? How can I contextualize the content?

**4. Conversations:** The survey has shown apparent dissatisfaction with detailing, which essentially boils down to monologue. The very reason behind why section of HCPs preferred interacting with senior persons from the pharma companies is; Seniors do not detail but discuss. They have the ability to converse meaningfully.

**Channels of Communication:** Only after the first 4 points are clearly understood, a right medium can be thought of. Personal, Remote or Digital? Which would be the right channel? Which medium is preferred by the doctor and has a content fit?

COVID 19 has given never-before opportunity to pause and press a reset button. They say it takes 21 days for a habit to change. COVID has given more than that time.

This is the time to go back to fundamental brand building principles. Listening to HCPs, understanding their pain points, and arriving at the desired solution is one of the most crucial steps in building a strong Healthcare brand.





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**Author of the best seller**

***The Perfect Pill: 10 Steps to  
Build a Strong Healthcare  
Brand***

