

the media lab

THINKING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

*Making diversity and inclusion
a core part of pharma's DNA*

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DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: PHARMA'S CHOICE, NECESSITY OR DUTY?

People in the industry are aware that more work needs to be done to improve D&I within pharma, but how intrinsic to a company's mission should it be? Many big pharma companies are heralding D&I as one of their key priorities, but, for one of the most powerful and influential industries in the world, is it a choice, a necessity or a duty? One expert believes that "it is all three. D&I is a choice we should make because it is a necessity and our duty to fulfil."

However, some feel that in making it a duty, there is a risk of initiatives feeling insincere or disingenuous. *"When we use words like duty or necessity, it raises concerns that it is forced. And if it is forced, then it is not genuine. There is a moral duty on all of us, individually and as companies. I prefer the words 'common sense'."*

Beyond what it is called, there is consensus that D&I should always be approached with respect, compassion, tolerance and acceptance. It is about changing behaviours and, as one expert explains, *"the best way to change behaviour is to be reflective and empathetic to that population."* There is a shared sentiment that there needs to be a broadening of minds.





TOKENISTIC ACTIONS VERSUS MEANINGFUL VALUE

Within the D&I space, audiences can be sceptical about public declarations from companies stating that they care about D&I, especially when industry leadership boards are predominantly made up of white, middle-class males. This portrays a huge disparity between what is being said and what is being done, fostering distrust in the communication being delivered. It cannot simply be a tokenistic effort to appease public pressure; as one expert says *"D&I needs to be embedded into the DNA of companies."*

It is one thing to say you care about improving D&I – it is another thing altogether to foster a truly inclusive environment. "Too much of the dialogue around diversity is tokenistic; it is just doing something for the sake of being diverse, which leads to no real or meaningful change."

D&I should be talked about, but it also needs to be lived and breathed, realistic and honest. In essence, companies need to practice what they preach and act if they hope to truly implement change. At the core, D&I efforts must be tangible, consistent and, above all else, authentic.

COMMUNICATING MEANINGFUL VALUE

Even when D&I efforts are woven into a company's DNA, and they are making real efforts to improve, communicating this to often-cynical audiences can be hugely challenging. But that doesn't mean it shouldn't be done. "We all have a responsibility to own our part and find a way to share our voice, our concerns and our thoughts about how we can do better."

Be authentic: audiences will see through empty statements so it is critical that communication surrounding D&I can be backed up with tangible actions.

Be consistent: D&I is not a 'flavour of the month' campaign and it should be embedded into a company's DNA.

Be honest: audiences prefer honesty and recognition that you need to do better as a company over self-praise that cannot be substantiated.

D&I needs to be embedded into the DNA of companies



D&I AND PATIENT ENGAGEMENT

The industry is abuzz with the idea that the future is 'patient-centric', but is it possible to achieve such a feat without first gaining a better understanding of the role of D&I within it? Across clinical trials and patient engagement, there is a lack of diversity of all kinds, from gender and race to socio-economic background and geographic location.

One expert explains: *"Most companies talk about being patient-centric and say that we bring patients in to talk to us about their diseases and how our products help them; but how often do we bring people from lower socio-economic groups? Those people don't have a voice. We speak to the people who do have a voice, but patient centricity is about all patients, not just the ones who have a seat at the table. There is more work to be done here."*

Along with access to healthcare, drug effectiveness can also be impacted by clinical trials that do not include a diverse group of patients. Women, for example, are more likely to suffer from adverse events from medication due to historic lack of participation in clinical trials.¹ While most people working in the industry are aware that "drug effectiveness can be impacted by race or gender," this is an important reminder as to why clinical trial diversity is so necessary.

Developing diverse inclusion criteria for clinical trials is critical – a given – but could, and should, the industry be doing more? For one expert this is an emphatic 'yes'. *"You have to build clinical trials with patients from the beginning, but this is rare in the industry. We should be inviting patients to write and plan the trial with us."*

DELIVERING SUCCESSFUL DIVERSE PATIENT COMMUNICATION

- *Choose new and different channels of communication – reaching the same populations through the traditional means is going to lead to the same results.*
- *Understand the value of enhanced communications in improving patients' understanding of their condition and treatment options.*
- *Use language that all patient groups can understand (accessibility is crucial here – think about the average literacy and numeracy levels) and avoid complex jargon.*
- *Recognise a duty to provide medication to everyone and focus on the patients who you do not typically communicate with.*
- *Give patients a seat at the table to be the 'voice of the disease' within the company.*
- *Show an understanding of, and support for, challenges that may stop patients engaging with or attending clinical trials, such as work or family commitments.*

BUILDING AND NURTURING A DIVERSE WORKFORCE

Change starts at home, and in 2016, an analysis found that the pharmaceutical industry had less gender and ethnic diversity than other industries in the Fortune 500². The research also found that one-third of the top 50 companies had no women on their board and that just 8% of seats were held by ethnically diverse directors.² While there has been a greater focus on improving D&I in the last few years, more improvement is needed.

Companies with diverse workforces are proven to be more successful,³ as a wealth of varying experiences and perspectives makes for more creative solutions and ideas. One expert concurs: *"If you want to try or experience something new, take someone who is completely different from you and work with them. They can offer different visions and perspectives. This is very enriching."* Sometimes, by recruiting for 'good cultural fit', companies are actually hindering their opportunity to build a diverse team. Aside from an ethical standpoint, it makes good business sense to invest in building a diverse workforce, providing opportunities for people with all types of backgrounds and experiences.

CHALLENGING TRADITIONAL RECRUITMENT

Traditional recruitment will no longer suffice if companies are going to reach and attract a more diverse pool of candidates. "If we're going to be more inclusive then we need to challenge traditional methods of recruitment," comments one expert. There is a responsibility to open up opportunities: *"We need to ensure that people have access to jobs."*

We [need to be] clear and transparent so that they understand and feel safe and encouraged to come forward and apply for these roles with confidence."

While it is important to improve the diversity and inclusivity of our recruitment processes, this again raises the risk of D&I becoming a box ticking exercise: *"At a certain point we have to recruit people, not because they are female or are from a certain background, but because they are the right person."* Rather than being a 'quota filling' task, making recruitment more inclusive is about broadening personal unconscious biases and widening the scope of the skills and experiences we are looking for. Again, companies need to challenge themselves to look outside of those who fit naturally and easily into their culture.

"What are the right skills? They may not be what was traditionally looked for, but perhaps we need to be broader in what we mean when we say: 'the right skills.' It is about making the top jobs available to the people who have the right skills and knowledge, even if those are different to what people in those roles currently have. I think we have a long way to go in the industry to embrace and accept that," explains one expert. Pharma is not alone in facing this challenge; there is work to be done in overcoming biases across all industries.

Diversity of roles is not just about race or gender and, as an industry, pharma is often guilty of having tunnel vision when it comes to recruitment: *"When we're recruiting, we always want somebody with pharma experience. My question is 'why do we?'"*

I've worked with people from outside my area and they have been much more successful with recruits because they look at physical skills rather than background. There is a lesson we can learn there: background is irrelevant because skills are adaptable to the environment. If we always take people who work in the same industry, nothing is ever going to change," comments one expert.

ALL FOR ONE

While D&I needs to be improved within companies from the initial recruitment stage, efforts should not, and cannot, stop there. HR and team leaders can select diverse candidates, but the onus is on every single employee to then nurture that talent and create an inclusive working environment. *"Each of us are leaders here and we have got to do work to identify talent wherever that comes from, and then mentor and nurture that talent,"* outlines one expert. Leadership teams can implement rules and initiatives, but these things need buy-in from all individuals if they are to have a real impact.

After diverse recruitment comes an even bigger hurdle: retention. Again, the whole company culture needs to be geared towards nurturing diverse talent and providing opportunities for people from all backgrounds. *"Recruiting diverse talent does not stop once they are in the building. That talent needs to be nurtured, with clear routes of progression ahead."* Representation within leadership teams is of utmost importance: if individuals cannot see anyone in a leadership position who they relate to or with whom they share experiences, the opportunities for progression may feel closed off to them.





MEASURING PROGRESS

One of the biggest challenges in ensuring the industry works to improve D&I is the question around how to assess whether progress is being made. Without measurable key performance indicators (KPIs) and targets, there is a danger of companies stating good intentions and plans to improve D&I, but not being held to account, or even just simply losing sight of the goal. While many aspects of business are measured and counted, if D&I is not, it risks being forgotten about, and deprioritised for tangible targets.

But what would KPIs and targets look like? D&I is a hugely broad and subjective topic and is not simply quantifiable. Different people and companies have varying ideas on what a diverse and inclusive environment looks like. One expert remarks: *“There should be some KPIs to make it directional and visible; however, there are certain things you cannot measure, such as personal involvement and feelings, which are challenging to capture.”*

Having planned KPIs and targets is made more complicated still for multi-country organisations, who may operate in some regions where introducing female leaders is simpler than those where there are still cultural taboos around gender and work.

There is a need to break entrenched, longstanding confirmation biases, that may go beyond something that can be measured in numbers.

Adding further complexity to the debate around measuring progress in D&I is the fact that it can reduce people to facts and figures. D&I is a highly sensitive topic for many people and should be handled as such – by measuring progress in quotas and KPIs we are at risk of placing people into boxes, which may not truly represent them. *“If we just focus on the figures and the numbers, then we forget the people,”* another expert comments.

Measurements, reflection and improvement are critical to driving progress, but this must be balanced with common sense and compassion.

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SUMMARY

IMPROVING D&I, ALONG WITH EQUALITY, IS A VAST AND COMPLEX UNDERTAKING, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN THAT WE SHOULD NOT EMBRACE THE CHALLENGE. FROM SMALLER CHANGES, SUCH AS COMMUNICATING ON A WIDER VARIETY OF CHANNELS, TO LONGER AND MULTIFACETED CHANGES, LIKE INVOLVING PATIENTS IN CLINICAL TRIAL DESIGN, IT IS ALWAYS EASIER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IF THE INTENTIONS ARE GENUINE AND AUTHENTIC.

THE DIALOGUE SURROUNDING D&I IS STILL IN ITS INFANCY AND THE STEPS BEING TAKEN ARE HEADING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. IN SUMMARISING THEIR THOUGHTS, ONE EXPERT CONCLUDES: *"I HOPE THAT IN THE FUTURE WE WON'T DISCUSS THE DUTY SURROUNDING D&I ANYMORE, BECAUSE IT WILL BE A PART OF OUR DAILY LIFE."*

CHANGE IS HAPPENING AND IT IS TIME FOR THE INDUSTRY TO CHOOSE WHETHER IT WILL SIMPLY FOLLOW PUBLIC PRESSURE AND PAY LIP SERVICE TO IMPROVING D&I, OR TO STRIDE TO BECOME A LEADER OF CHANGE AND A CHAMPION OF D&I.

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I hope that in the future we won't discuss the duty surrounding D&I anymore, because it will be a part of our daily life."



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