Establishing a lay review panel to ensure medical research accessibility

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OBJECTIVE

- Ensuring the accessibility of medical publications to non-specialist practitioners and non-medically qualified readers is extremely important.
- A mid-sized pharma company established an internal lay review panel to review materials for lay audiences (patient community and the general public) and non-specialist practitioners (**Panel 1**).
- We summarize lay panel development and activity, alongside practical advice for others wishing to create a lay panel.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

- The company leveraged their workforce for eligible volunteers (company employees in a non-medical/non-commercial role with a non-medical background). Volunteers reviewed documents for clarity of language and suggested improvements via a simple questionnaire.

RESULTS

- On December 1, 2024, the internal lay panel comprised 50 reviewers, with job roles varying widely including Human Resources, Legal, Supply Chain and Finance (**Panel 2**). The panel had reviewed 115 documents, including plain-language summaries, patient response documents, lay summaries, and patient-facing educational materials (**Panel 3**). Panel members had been keen to contribute and most (34/50) had reviewed multiple documents (average documents per reviewer = 10.5) (**Panel 4**).
- In our experience, the following have been key to ensuring an effective lay panel: having reviewers that span multiple functions; having 3–5 reviewers per document; matching reviewers with their area(s) of interest; assigning reviewers with appropriate availability; internal recognition of reviewer efforts; continuous volunteer recruitment and building a pool of contacts to avoid reviewer burden (**Panel 5**).

CONCLUSIONS

- A lay panel was successfully established and routinely reviews appropriate materials to improve how medical information is read and understood by non-specialist practitioners and non-medical readers.
- Future development will include: customizing lay review questionnaires to document type; expanding the lay panel remit; obtaining additional support from vendors; providing a structured training program (Health Literacy Curriculum); establishing a separate patient expert panel for specific documents (**Panel 6**).

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What we did

Established an internal lay panel to review materials for lay audiences

How we did it

Recruitment of non-medical volunteers	Recruited from within the company: *Representative of a non-expert, lay audience*
Review of lay document	Completion of questionnaire: *Clarity of language, suitability for a broad audience and suggestions for any improvements*

Panel 1: Lay documents types

Plain language summary	Patient response document	Lay summary/Lay protocol synopsis	Educational materials
A short overview of a scientific publication using simple language that is jargon-free and avoids technical terms	A product-specific document that uses simple language targeted to patients, caregivers and/or members of the general public in response to a medical information enquiry	A brief overview of a research study that uses simple language	Patient leaflets, educational presentations and patient-faced materials for patient support programmes

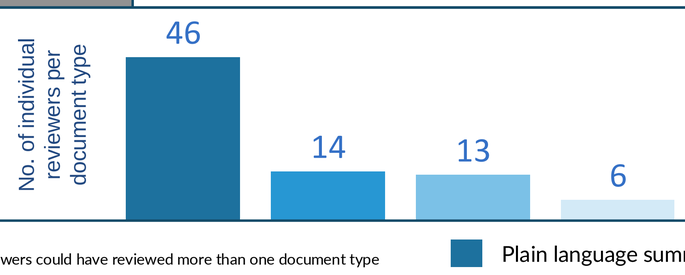
Panel 2: Reviewer job roles[a]

- Supply Chain/Manufacturing
- Procurement
- Communications
- Human Resource
- Legal
- Finance
- IT
- Business Ethics
- Assistant
- Digital Excellence

[a]Excludes commercial functions, Research and Development, Medical Affairs, Market Access and HEOR

Panel 3: Summary of lay reviews

384	Reviews completed	338	14 23 9
115	Lay documents reviewed	102	3 6 4
50	Total reviewers to date[a]	3.34	Reviews per document on average



[a]Reviewers could have reviewed more than one document type

Panel 4: Lay reviewer participation and reviewer perceptions

- **34** volunteers reviewed more than once
- **358** reviews were completed
- **10.5** documents were reviewed on average
- The top reviewer completed **92** reviews

"Coming from a non-science background this is the first time that I was able to understand the article. You all are doing an incredible job in writing Plain language summary. It has made people's life easier"

"This is a very interesting initiative and a change from my HR activities. It is a way to connect to the patient journey and experience as well as an opportunity to learn about the clinical trials and products"

"I am immensely proud of the work the team does to make these summaries available to our patients and am so happy to be a part of that process on the back end"

"This is a spectacular way to get involved in making a difference for patients when you don't have a medical background"

Panel 5: Practical advice for establishing and managing a lay review panel

Diversity	Ensure reviewers span multiple functions *(gather broader input to improve suitability across a wider audience)*
Optimize	Select 3–5 reviewers per document and assign 1–2 documents per reviewer per week *(balance the number of reviewers with time to review and volume of work)*
Suitability	Match reviewers with their preferred therapy area/disease state *(increase reviews by focusing documents on interested volunteers)*
Capacity	Assign reviewers with appropriate availability; usually 10 working days *(ensure lay reviews do not negatively impact overall project delivery and allow sufficient time for reviewers to balance their workload)*
Recruitment	Continuous call for new volunteers *(build a growing pool of volunteers to meet increasing demand for lay review, and avoid individual reviewer burden)*

Panel 6: Future development of the lay panel

☑ Increase reviewer pool size	Increase the number of internal company reviewers
☑ Customize questionnaires	Link reviewer readouts to document type
☑ Establish patient expert panel	Establish an external review panel with patient experts to ensure patient review of lay language documents
☑ Formal acknowledgement	Encourage continued support and interest from volunteers by recognising their achievement
☑ Additional support	To alleviate burden on existing lay panel members, large workloads may be resourced to a third-party vendor(s)
☑ Health Literacy Curriculum	Provide a structured training program to enhance the skills and knowledge of teams working on patient-facing materials
☑ Expand remit	All documents targeted at a lay audience should be reviewed by a lay panel

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