

*Oncologist/Hematologist Survey*

## Reputation Rx: Genentech Leads, Others Play Catch Up

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Even after its acquisition by Roche AG, Genentech Inc. still has the best image amongst oncologists and hematologists, according to a recent study by Market Strategies International.

Becoming beloved by cancer docs isn't easy. Novartis AG took the second spot overall, and the big pharma's ability to shrink its gap behind Genentech – as well as the actions of other companies on the list – give clues as to how oncology firms can improve their image.

Brock Walter, vice president of healthcare research and consulting at Market Strategies International, said that – unsurprisingly – sales reps have a big impact on how doctors view a company. A helpful sales rep can improve a doctor's perceptions even if the doctor isn't fond of the company's products. Conversely, a doctor might develop a negative image of a company simply because he or she doesn't like the rep.

It's not just doctors that sales forces have to focus on. Nurses and office managers also affected the overall image of the oncology companies, according to Market Strategies. "Nurses want education and information, and managers want help with reimbursement," Walter said.

R&D also plays a critical role in overall image. Dependable clinical trials, innovative research, and developing beneficial products are all key drivers of positive image.

"If a company is looking to improve their image, they have to be able to effectively educate oncologists about progress in their clinical development program," Walter said. Sales forces are limited in what they can say about unapproved medications, so other means of communication are important.

Launching a new product can also help drive a company's image upward. Amgen Inc. increased its overall image from fifth to third place among office-based and hospital-based oncologists thanks in part to the launch of

bone metastases drug Xgeva (denosumab). (See *BioWorld Today*, Nov. 22, 2010.)

A new product allows reps additional touch points where they can talk to doctors about all the oncology products in the firm's portfolio. "It put the company back in oncologists' minds," Walter said of Xgeva's launch. A decrease in the amount of negative news about side effects associated with Amgen's erythropoiesis-stimulating agents helped as well.

Another way companies can improve their image is by acquiring another oncology company. The affect on the overall image is dependent on the starting point of the acquiring company. Historical analysis has shown that companies in the top half of the rankings see a half-position improvement on average, while those in the bottom half typically see a two-position jump. The improvement typically holds for at least two years.

Walter hypothesizes that purchases may be viewed by doctors as the acquiring company making oncology a priority. The combined sales force also may enhance its reputation amongst doctors by leveraging the best of both original models. Or the observed increase could be something as simple as the acquisition, and hoopla around it, increasing the "top-of-mind awareness" of the company, Walter said.

Based on history, Sanofi SA's recent acquisition of Genzyme Inc. should help improve its image amongst hematologists, where it ranks in the middle. For oncologists, Sanofi currently ranks fairly high and may see a more modest increase. (See *BioWorld Today*, Feb. 17, 2011.)

While companies strive to improve, being on top isn't necessarily easy. In addition to being the target of all competitors, "there wasn't much room to improve and grow," Walter said of Genentech's top-spot image over the last few years.



**Brock Walter**

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