White Paper

Developing Lifecycle-based Thought Leader Engagement Strategies
Key Study Findings

By Yanis Saradjian, Founder and CEO, Arx Research

Arx Research provides decision support to pharmaceutical executives and life science organizations through industry insights powered by primary research intelligence. Our work covers a wide range of topics within medical affairs, thought leader management, KOL fair-market value compensation rates and sales.

Arx Research also conducts custom-designed research initiatives to provide clients with factual answers in the areas of operational and competitive assessments and benchmarking. Our tailor-designed research from primary sources provides intelligent solutions to solve issues that are unique to our clients.

Arx analysts recently completed a study on strategies used by pharmaceutical organizations when engaging thought leaders during each phase of a product's lifecycle. This white paper presents key study findings.

Developing Lifecycle-based Thought Leader Engagement Strategies: Key Study Findings

Foreword

Thought leaders are critical to the life science environment and to ensure pharmaceutical organizations inform physicians and patients about products' scientific uses, outcomes and benefits. Because of reporting regulations implemented in the last decade, medical affairs executives and medical field teams must now recruit and establish working relationships from a shrinking thought leader pool. This reality requires that medical affairs professionals make the best out of each thought leader relationship they develop.

According to this research, relationship longevity is a key goal. Life science organizations establish relationships with thought leaders very early in a product's development and often maintain them many years after a product's launch.

While many organizations employ set strategies to determine which type of thought leader to use during each phase of development, and for what type of activity, many still do not apply any specific tactics, preferring an ad-hoc approach to interacting with thought leaders.

We conducted a study to identify best practices, gather insights and develop benchmarks for optimal thought leader engagement. The full study aims to reveal how pharmaceutical companies engage with thought leaders, which types of thought leader they target during the various phases of a product development, which levels of influence these leading companies most pursue, and how they conduct these exchanges. Full study findings are presented from a global perspective and by regional segments for US and Europe.

The following Key Study Findings are excerpts from the study (details at end of document): **Thought Leader Utilization: Refining Strategies and Tactics for Optimal KOL Engagement**

Research Methodology

Arx Research analysts used primary research resources to develop this study. Analysts collected the quantitative and qualitative data through surveys and interviews conducted with 47 medical affairs and thought leader management executives from 34 life science organization located in 15 countries across Asia, Europe and Latin and North America.

Arx Research

70% of surveyed companies employ lifecycle phase approaches to engage with thought leaders

Life science organizations recognize that interactions with thought leaders are important and that the relationships cultivated with thought leaders will eventually lead to many benefits.

Currently, companies are still refining the approaches used to working with thought leaders. When asked about their company's approach to thought leader engagement strategies, 70% of surveyed executives indicate that they approach the various thought-leader categories based on where the product lies in its lifecycle. **Figure A** shows that 30% of survey takers do not use any distinct or specific approach based on lifecycle phases.

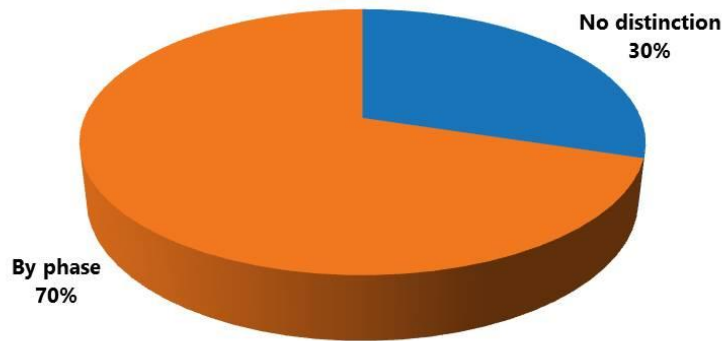## Strategic Approach to Thought Leader Engagement

Figure A: Strategic Approach to Thought Leader Engagement

For both U.S. and European respondents, the proportions are very similar to the surveyed group as a whole. While 36% of U.S. and 29% of European surveyed executives do not employ approach strategies depending on a product's lifecycle, a much smaller proportion of executives in Asia and Latin America regions report not using lifecycle-driven approaches to engaging thought leaders.

24% of surveyed respondents reported their company begins developing relationships with KOLs before phase 1, while close to 40% wait until phase 3

A significant number of surveyed organizations – 39%, as shown in **Figure B** – report that initial engagements with thought leaders start during phase 3 of a product's lifecycle. Two percent begin at launch, but starting to cultivate thought leader relationships so late in a product development phase will most likely not yield the desired outcomes for companies.

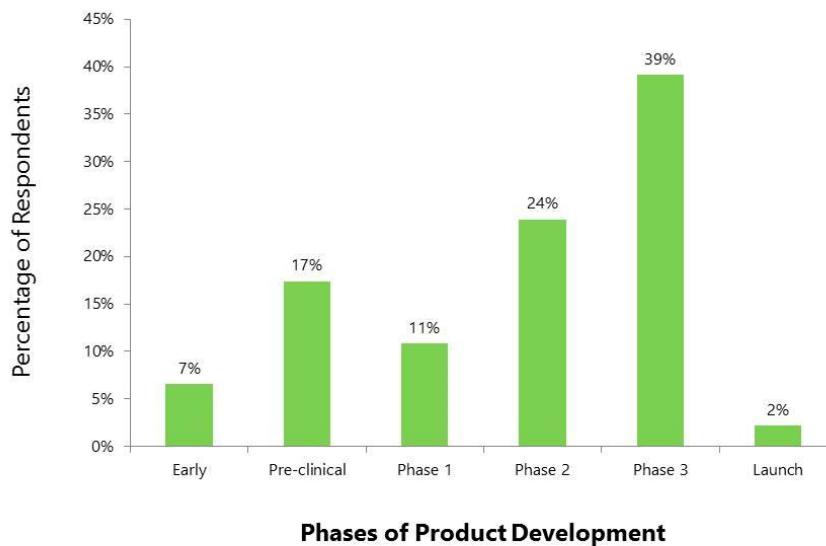## Timeline of Initial Thought Leader Engagement

Figure B: Timeline of Initial Thought Leader Engagement

Waiting to involve thought leaders when a product is close to or under regulatory review reduces the potential efficacy of hiring thought leaders. Thought leaders worthy of hire will very likely have important insights at every stage of development, meaning to fully maximize a thought leader's expertise, companies should engage them as early as possible, perhaps at or even before the investigational phases begin.

Close to 25% of surveyed executives indicate engaging with KOLs during early and pre-clinical phases, securing the advantage of developing thought leader relationships and their

knowledge of the product for several more years than companies that begin their efforts later in the lifecycle.

KOLs with timely exposure to early research and development efforts will better understand the science behind the potential product, leading to a higher commitment and interest in its scientific outcomes and benefits. Regardless of how the product turns out, approved or not, thought leaders involved in early and pre-clinical phases will provide valuable input to the research and subsequent patient trial phases.

Phase 3 Shift : during pre-clinical to phase 2 of trials, companies focus on engaging top-level KOLs for clinical and scientific activities; beginning in phase 3, organizations start interacting more prominently with KOLs closer to patient populations and begin commercially related activities.

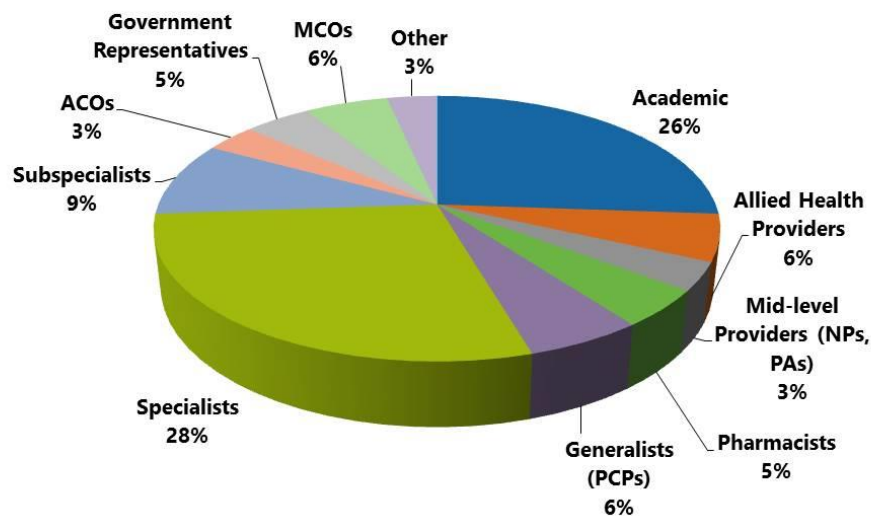## Targeted Thought Leaders: Phase 3

Figure C: Targeted Thought Leaders: Phase 3

Survey results show that beginning in phase 3, pharmaceutical organizations target every thought-leader category (**Figure C**). While the focus remains on specialist and academic KOLs, medical affairs professionals also approach every other thought-leader category or group.

At phase 3, more than 60% of organizations have begun staffing medical field teams, which means added resources to disseminate the product's scientific profile.

Overall, phase 3 indicates a shift in how organizations approach thought leaders. Due primarily to more certainty about a product's market viability at this stage, companies add resources in order to formally disseminate scientific information to the physician community.

Survey data also reveals a shift toward educating physician communities closer to the Phase 3 data also reveals a shift toward educating physician communities closer to the patient populations. Survey results show that at this point in a product's lifecycle, organizations begin shifting efforts away from the higher levels of influencers toward national level KOLs (**Figure D**). Study participants reveal a shift of more than 10% from levels 1 and 2 to the benefit of level 3 KOLs.
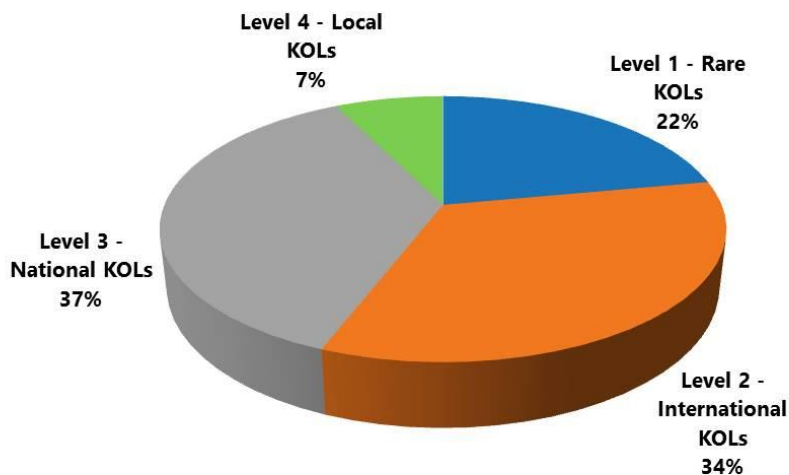
Targeted Thought Leaders Levels: Phase 3

Level 4 - Local KOLs 7%

Level 1 - Rare KOLs 22%

Level 3 - National KOLs 37%

Level 2 - International KOLs 34%

Figure D: Targeted Thought Leader Levels: Phase 3

Launch Refocus: Upon reaching phase 3, medical affairs moves closer to their patient populations by engaging nationally-recognized thought leaders and a small proportion of local KOLs. At launch, this priority reverses in a pronounced manner: medical affairs shifts to engage local thought leadership that will serve as boots on the ground for the product going to market.

As a product "hits" the market, most organizations are closing in on completely staffing their medical affairs function. Medical field teams continue to work with thought leaders with whom they have developed relationships during the pre-launch phases, while they also look to other groups of thought leaders in an effort to more expansively disseminate a product's scientific information.

At launch, many of the uncertainties around a product disperse, and life science organizations begin efforts to get even closer to physician communities and their patient populations.
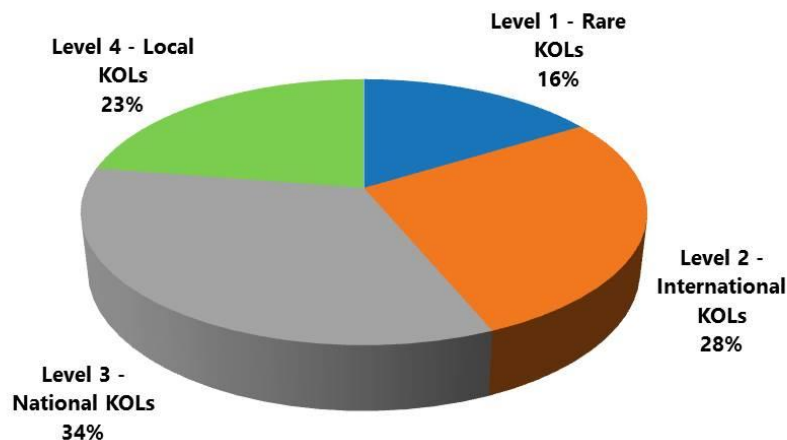
Targeted Thought Leaders Levels: Launch

Figure E: Targeted Thought Leader Levels: Launch

Data reveals a dramatic shift toward educating local leaders and physician communities. Survey takers focus much more on engaging local thought leaders, moving on from the top-level KOL groups of rare, international, and to a lesser degree, national.

While the top three groups represent 93% of the engagement focus in phase 3, they make up only 78% in the launch phase, with local thought leader targets now representing 23% of the overall targeted thought leader levels (**Figure E**).

Organizations tend to refocus their efforts to engage with levels of thought leaders with more local impact, basically working their way from the top down as the products move through the phases of development up to launch.

Although executives from organization to organization and region to region do not always align on the strategies employed to engage with thought leaders in the pre-launch phases of a product development, the majority of executives surveyed through this study report shifting their targeted thought leader levels during the launch phase, as shown in these graphics. The data show a significant strategic consensus to shift the focus from higher KOL levels to local thought leadership at launch.

Quality of scientific support and materials is by far the most important factor influencing KOL relationships

Since many functions engage in various capacities with thought leaders, we thought it beneficial to pull information from previous research to outline factors that affect the development of the pharma-KOL relationships.

In **Figure F**, surveyed medical affairs professionals indicate that the quality of the scientific support and materials, most particularly during exchanges with thought leaders, always proves a critical component of their work. Not having the appropriate materials (outdated or containing flawed facts) makes their work difficult and can damage how the thought leaders perceive them and the company.

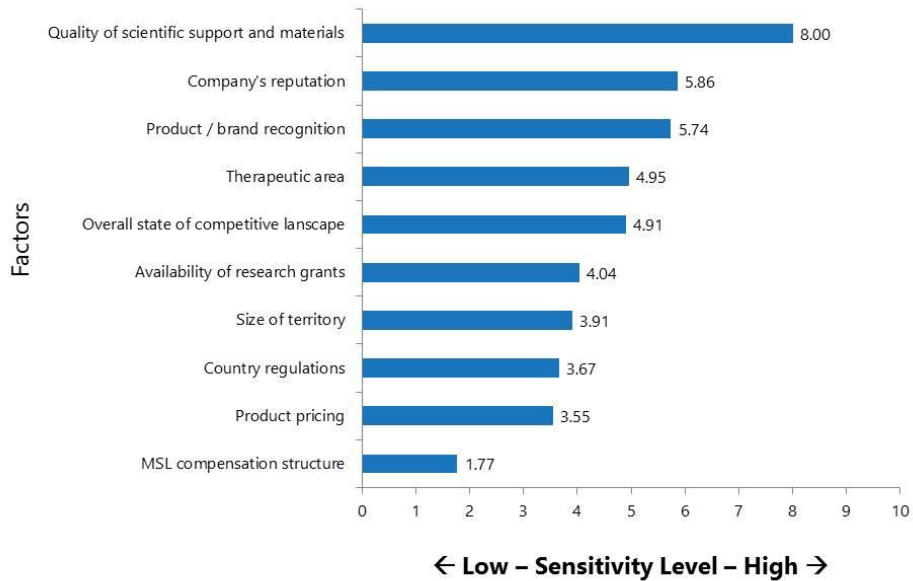## Ranking of Factors Influencing KOL Relationships

Figure F: Ranking of Sensitivity of Factors Influencing KOL Relationships

A company's reputation comes in second. When a company's reputation suffers in the market, thought leaders will not give priority to the attached MSLs.

The next most sensitive factor, product or brand recognition, goes hand-in-hand with company reputation. If a product wasn't able to prove enough of a "game changer" in a trial, therapy or disease management — or if a company has struggled to get marketing approval for a product — thought leaders may not be inclined to even hear about its scientific features or benefits and therefore limit their exposure to company representatives supporting the product.

The next two factors influencing KOL relationships, therapeutic area and competitive landscape, are also related; they both pertain to the environment in which the products evolves. A MSL supporting a product in an environment where there are dozens of competitors may have a harder time getting the opportunity to work with KOLs because many MSLs and companies covet these experts.

In Summary

Aggregate Study Results

As outlined in this research, both the specialists and academic categories of thought leaders are the most sought after, in all studied regions. Only a few of organizations surveyed opt to engage with only one of these two categories. Pharmacists, a category previously not prominent in the mix of thought leaders targeted, are now sought after by half the surveyed companies.

As a product move through the development phases, the study shows that life science organizations wind down the proportion of academic and specialists thought leader engagements to expand their exchanges with the other categories, in an effort to widen the dissemination of scientific knowledge to the markets.

The use of different levels of influence will also vary from phase to phase. While the majority of engagements are targeted toward top level influencers during pre-clinical to phase 3, organizations shift the balance of their focus to national and local thought leaders at launch time, in an effort to deepen and amplify scientific information dissemination on a product, closer to the patient population.

The set of activities for which life science organization employ thought leaders will also change through the course of a product development. While organizations mostly look for thought leader input through advisory board and consulting activities during the pre-launch phases, companies increase speaking activities at launch time and beyond, again, in efforts to disseminate the product information to physician communities.

Analysts understand each organization has its own specific needs requiring customization of any strategy put forward and therefore the findings outlined in this document are neither fail-proof models nor models for wholesale implementation. We provide this information as research summary that can serve as baseline guides to initiate or supplement existing KOL engagement strategy.

Findings outlined in this white paper are extracted from the full study:

Thought Leader Utilization by Phase: Refining Strategies and Tactics for Optimal KOL Engagement

Four report options to accommodate medical affairs professionals' needs:

Full study includes full analysis and graphics for global, US, Europe and other regions
Number of pages: 106
Format: Full study, PDF

Full Executive Summary includes graphics for global, US, Europe and other regions
Number of slides: 129
Format: Executive summary deck, PDF

US Executive Summary includes graphics for global and US
Number of slides: 79
Format: Executive summary deck, PDF

Europe Executive Summary includes graphics for global and Europe
Number of slides: 79
Format: Executive summary deck, PDF

Reports are available here:
https://www.arxresearch.com/product-category/thought-leader-management/

Use of Arx Research's Copyrighted Materials

Arx Research LLC
5 Walpole Street
P.O. Box 123
Dover, MA 02030-0123
+1 617-233-6736
https://www.arxresearch.com/
Contact: info@arxresearch.com