

Trends in the Medical Communications Industry – and How to Respond?

Dr Dawn Lobban

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In her insightful presentation “Trends in the Medical Communications Industry – and How to Respond?”, Dr Dawn Lobban outlined three major trends transforming the medical communications (Medcomms) industry.

Drawing on her extensive experience, she explored how Artificial Intelligence (AI), patient engagement, and the evolving professional skillset are reshaping the landscape, and how Medcomms professionals should adapt.

1. The Rise of AI in Medical Communications

Dr Lobban opened by addressing the exponential growth of AI and its implications. AI is already being used across the industry for:

- Meeting summaries
- Literature reviews
- Plain language summaries
- Pilot phase content creation
- Chatbots for standardised responses
- Competitive intelligence
- Strategic planning

However, she cautioned that AI introduces significant challenges, including:

- Data privacy concerns
- Factual inaccuracies (“hallucinations”)
- Lack of transparency in source data
- A tendency toward content quantity over quality

This raises key questions for agencies:

- How can AI be used effectively while maintaining human oversight?
- What are the implications for training and recruitment?

With automation potentially reducing entry-level opportunities, there is a pressing need to equip future Medcomms professionals with:

- Critical thinking skills
- A solid understanding of what good medical writing is

One example of AI's positive potential, demonstrating how “through collaboration with new stakeholder groups, we can develop new AI enabled solutions” came from a project presented to the ISMPP annual meeting, where AI was used to build a patient lexicon for rare diseases. The collaboration between medical writers, patients and new stakeholders, the data scientists, highlighted how AI can improve patient communications — if guided by skilled human input.

Dr Lobban stressed that the “human-in-the-loop” remains essential. Rather than fearing AI, she encouraged professionals to embrace it, develop expertise in using it, and continue to drive the conversation around quality and interpretation.

2. The Rise of Patient Engagement

Dr Lobban's second major theme, one she described as a personal passion, focused on the growing role of patient engagement in drug development.

While historically hindered by concerns about compliance, leadership support, and the perceived value of patient feedback, she argued that these are often outdated or misinformed.

In fact, regulatory agencies like the FDA and EMA now actively support patient involvement. Leading medical affairs teams are recognising its strategic importance, as outlined in a recent MAPS white paper.

Dr Lobban noted that patients are increasingly professionalising, gaining the skills and knowledge to engage as credible partners. Organisations, such as:

- PFMD
- ISMPP
- MAPS

...offer tools and training to support this.

She advised Medcomms teams to:

- Work with the right patients — those who bring lived experience and represent patient communities
- Demonstrate and publish the impact of their engagement efforts

- Include patient authorship and affiliations to amplify the patient voice in scientific literature

3. The Evolving Role of Medcomms Professionals

Finally, Dr Lobban highlighted how the role of Medcomms professionals is shifting.

While traditional skills remain vital:

- Scientific knowledge
- Scientific precision
- Technical writing expertise
- HCP engagement

...newer skills are now equally critical:

- Cultural competence
- Emotional intelligence
- Storytelling
- Health literacy training
- Inclusive communication

These skills are especially important when engaging with non-HCP audiences, particularly patients.

From an agency recruitment perspective, the most valuable candidates will bring:

- AI knowledge
- Patient engagement expertise
- Soft skills
- A strong grasp of diversity and communication

Final Thoughts

Dr Lobban closed with practical advice:

1. Make sure you are in the right place.
2. Embrace AI thoughtfully.
3. Celebrate your human skills.
4. Collaborate with each other.

Quoting Helen Keller, she reminded attendees:

“Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much.”

Summary by Irena Ivanova MD