

# You Have the Clinical Data. But What's the Story?

Medical Leverage

Carl Roselle

3.12.2021

## What's the story?

*Here's what we all know:* In the pharmaceutical industry, clinical data reigns supreme. It proves efficacy and safety. It provides reasons to believe. It's what (hopefully) differentiates your drug candidate. And, of course, it's the price of entry into the marketplace. Without reliable clinical data, your drug candidate is DOA.

*Here's what some of us might not know:* Your clinical data should be telling a story. If it isn't, or if it's not telling the right story, there's a significant chance that your compound is stumbling out of the gate. There is also a chance that it is falling short of its potential to make a difference in the lives of patients who could benefit from it. When providers aren't prescribing your drug candidate because they don't understand its safety and efficacy profile, or because a competitor is telling a more compelling story with their data, that's a missed opportunity for everyone, especially healthcare professionals and patients.

But it doesn't have to be. Not if you put your focus on creating a factual, relatable, and captivating story that conveys the most significant information regarding your data.

## The Science of Story

Human beings have been sharing stories throughout their entire existence. Some of the earliest forms existed as cave drawings that depicted stories of hunting and rituals. But what does this possibly have to do with clinical data in the 21st century? Everything. Great stories, even those about clinical data, connect us, inspire us, and propel us to do something.

Extensive research has been done (and continues to be done) regarding the impact story narratives have on our brain. Neuroscientists and others have found that, when we listen to stories, various chemicals are released in our brain. These include dopamine, cortisol, and oxytocin. In her Harvard Business Publishing Corporate Learning article, *The Science Behind the Art of Storytelling*, Lani Peterson explained why the release of these chemicals matters when it comes to using storytelling in business.

"If we are trying to make a point stick, cortisol assists with our formulating memories. Dopamine, which helps regulate our emotional responses, keeps us engaged. When it comes to creating deeper connections with others, oxytocin is associated with empathy, an important element in building, deepening or



maintaining good relationships." In other words, if you want people to engage with, trust, remember, and apply your clinical data, the use of storytelling can help you achieve that.

## It's About MORE Than Just the Facts

Facts are critically important when it comes to presenting your clinical data, but they don't always speak for themselves. If you use your clinical data in communications with multiple stakeholders—from healthcare professionals to patients to investors—you need to know what level of data literacy each of those audiences has. Not everyone in every audience can effectively analyze your clinical data in a way that will lead them to the understanding you want them to have.

When you present your clinical data without a story in mind, even to those who process or analyze that type of information routinely, you run the risk of missing important connections. That's why you should never assume that every audience can put all of the pieces together and come up with the picture you need them to see.

In her book *Data Story: Explain Data and Inspire Action Through Story*, Nancy Duarte highlighted a statistic that should serve as a showstopper for anyone charged with communicating data. She explained that, when being presented with data alone, "only 5% remember individual statistics." On the other hand, 63% remembered the stories. To be clear, stories in this context aren't starting with "once upon a time." Instead, they're narratives that provide an accessible structure in which your data points can live and be understood.

## Getting Started with Clinical Data Storytelling

There's no real mystery to solve when creating a narrative for your clinical data. But there are some things to keep in mind before starting.

**Know the Story That Needs to be Told.** This falls into the category of "if you don't know where you're going, you'll never get there." So, the first thing you need to do when beginning to develop a narrative for your data is to determine what story it needs to tell. Is it the same story for every audience? Are there certain points that need to be emphasized for specific audiences? What do you want each audience to understand about your clinical data and why? And what



do you want them to do once they come to that understanding? These questions have to be asked and answered by a cross-functional team of medical directors, marketers, and other key individuals within your organization before an effective narrative can be developed.

Provide Context by Organizing Clinical Data in a Familiar Structure. There are a variety of storytelling structures used for all different types of writing. For business purposes, the following rise to the top:

### **Problem/Agitate/Solution (PAS)**

With this structure, you first present the problem that the audience (or, in the case of clinical data, patients) face. Then, you amplify-or agitate-that problem. Finally, you bring in your drug candidate as the solution.

### **Attention/Interest/Desire/Action (AIDA)**

Like the PAS structure, the AIDA structure can work with HCP audiences. It's a bit more involved and might work better with audiences who aren't regular consumers of clinical data. The AIDA structure provides a longer "runway" for gaining an audience's attention.

With AIDA, you use content to first gain the attention of a specific audience. You want to engage them by providing information that's relatable. If you've done that well, the audience becomes interested in your drug candidate. They want to learn more about it. Then, once they understand what your drug candidate can do for them, they want it. And, finally, they want to know how they can get it.

Both are proven models for connecting audiences with information in ways that help them understand what it is you're attempting to communicate.

## **Think About the Language You Use**

Not everyone understands the shorthand and the lingo used in clinical trial data. And, if they don't understand what you're saying, they're not going to pay attention. So, know your audience. What's their level of data literacy? How much or how little do you need to explain to them? Find the answers to these questions before constructing your story.



There are many ways you can determine the level of data literacy a particular audience has. One simple way is to ask a member of that audience. Another would be to look at the media sources they use to learn about other types of drug candidates or research such as yours. And "social listening" - which is monitoring what your audience is talking about on social media-can also yield some very fruitful results.

When talking about your clinical data, using the language your audience uses can go a long way toward establishing understanding of the data and the audience's trust in you.

### Use Visuals to Explain-Not Confuse

If you think that having line charts or bar graphs will be sufficient for explaining your clinical data, you might be right in some cases. But, in others, you'd be absolutely wrong.

Using visuals to enhance the story you're telling about your clinical data can be incredibly powerful. But they must be created in a way that promotes understanding. If they're too complex, some audiences might tune out. If they're too simple, some audiences might not take the data seriously.

You also need to think about how you're labeling charts and graphs so that their purpose is clear. And, within these visuals, data points should be easily identifiable and understood.

Visual storytelling is a critical element of successful data storytelling. Use it to bring attention to the most important data a specific audience should be aware of and make sure that it's done in a way that doesn't just make things "look pretty." It should always be done in a way that explains and clarifies.

### Is Creating a Compelling Story about Your Clinical Data Worth It?

Putting in the time and effort to craft a compelling story with your clinical data can feel like an inconvenience at best and an overwhelming burden at worst. So, is it worth it? *Absolutely.*

Your organization has put considerable resources into collecting data. But that's not where the important work ends. Instead, it continues. Now is the time to



be a champion for that data, to put it into context, to make sure that it's fully understood, and to present it in a way that maximizes its potential.

As we've discussed, if an audience (whether it consists of investors, patients, healthcare professionals or other stakeholders) doesn't, or can't, understand how your clinical data relates to them or if they don't understand what it means within a certain context, it's much too easy for them to overlook your drug candidate. But, when you create a compelling narrative about your clinical data, this can lead to more sales, greater adherence, and increased brand loyalty.

**If you'd like to explore how the story of your clinical data can be written or improved, contact Carl Roselle at Medical Leverage. We'd love to help you tell that story.**