



The Total Office Call: Maximizing Sales and Market Share Through Early Planning

An Amplity Health Article

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Pre-COVID-19, Pharmaceutical Sales Representatives (reps) would walk into a medical office/facility healthcare professional's (HCP) office, politely introduce themselves and ask to see the prescriber. While they were waiting, they might've made casual conversation with the receptionist over the picture on their desk.

Here in 2021, that routine feels like a distant memory. With in-person, face-to-face HCP engagements restricted by travel bans and occupancy limits, COVID-19 forced the Pharmaceutical (Pharma) industry to undergo years of digital transformation in a matter of months. Preliminary changes were abrupt, drastic, and completely overwhelming.



Initial upskilling was painful but relatively straightforward: teaching reps compliant communication skills for remote engagement. The biggest surprise came thereafter, when reps became paralyzed by the initial, harsh “no!” HCP's gatekeepers offered over the phone.

Now that HCP interactions are digital, the task is no longer a matter of how to get past the gatekeeper but rather how to *engage* the gatekeeper. It doesn't stop there - the gatekeeper is just one of up to a dozen other members of the Prescriber's staff.

Reps must be trained to engage with all individuals in the clinic, not *just* the prescriber. Furthermore, management must re-define their success metrics to be inclusive of all prescriber's office members. This approach might've been forced upon the industry by the pandemic, but it'll be here long after COVID-19's travel bans are lifted.

This concept goes against the primary goal every field rep is taught from day one of training: a sole focus on getting to the doctors. This hasn't changed, but it's worth equaling out the playing field. A recent study showed that doctors spend as little as seven minutes per patient, but the Nurse Practitioners and Physicians Assistants report spending as much as 20 minutes with new patients and 12-14 minutes on follow-ups.²

To truly be patient-centric, Pharma must spend time and resources on all office staff members who are spending time with and/or providing support for the patient, not *just* the prescriber. This concept has been proven successful - Pharma has reported their promotional campaigns that target both the physician and their supporting staff have achieved increased return on investment (ROI).¹ Reps are being remiss if they're not calling on the entire office.

The Total Office Call (TOC) is no longer a concept; it's a necessity

Regardless of the size of the practice or the specialty, each HCP's office has an ecosystem. To implement the TOC, you must first familiarize yourself with the office staff – who they are, what they do, how they interact with patients, and how they influence the prescriber.

Healthcare Business Professionals

To successfully engage with the **gatekeeper**, you must immediately explain how whatever you're calling about will ultimately help their patients.

“Once the receptionist answers the phone, you have one shot. One shot to succinctly state your specific purpose and quickly connect it back to the patients so the HCP knows your goals are aligned.”

Amy Sullivan, Remote Engagement Training Manager, Amplify Health

Disrespecting or attempting to blow by the gatekeeper are equally catastrophic. If your response is combative or angry when a gatekeeper says no on your first try, you're only guaranteeing that they will also say no on your second or third.



Among their other tasks, **the Office Manager** could very well be responsible for screening or even blocking the decision-makers from solicitations. Furthermore, they're critical to access to the drug or the therapy - they're the ones who have the business knowledge to help patients get the products they need. They often have a great understanding of the office dynamics, policies, procedures, and patient demographics. A discussion with an office manager can prove to be very productive if reps ask the right questions to uncover valuable information that will take them steps closer to their ultimate goal of impacting patient care. Not only can you offer valuable information, but you can also get valuable information from them. Don't underestimate these exchanges.

Billing Coordinators handle patient's medical invoices and communicate with their health insurance companies, an administrative task often synonymous with keeping a patient on treatment. If a rep doesn't establish a relationship with them, they're missing an opportunity to prevent losing a sale.

On the same note, **Case Managers and Patient Educators** have ongoing relationships with patients. Especially in complex therapy areas, getting patients out of a facility and home with their treatment plan is hardly possible without support. Having a relationship with these team members means helping patients maintain patient care access and, ultimately, their medication.

Medical Assistants, certified or registered, should be considered like a nurse, from a rep's perspective. Establishing a relationship with them is critical because of how much time they spend with the patient checking their vitals and completing necessary paperwork.



Prescriber's Decision Influencers

The next group of treatment team members are those that highly influence the prescriber's decision-makers. Like the importance of befriending your new partner's best friend, the rep should consider **Nurse Practitioners, Nurses** (including various nurse roles, like triage nurses) and **Physicians Assistants** are fundamental to the success of a TOC. The clinical information shared should be the same a rep would disclose to the prescriber, if nothing else, in hopes to grow brand-share and revenue to consistently deliver on product goals.



Prescribers really appreciate when you reassure them that you're connecting with the rest of their team allowing them to stay **focused on the patient.**

- Tobi Tilsner, Senior Sales Director, Amplify Health



To stop here would be to defy the basic principles of the TOC. You know by now that it's all about getting medications to the patients, so it's obvious how significant a role the person distributing medication is the **Pharmacist**. Remember – it's not just about getting the patient on a script; it's also about *keeping* the patient on script.



This is precisely what Pharmacists went to school for – medication is their career. It's safe to assume they're passionate about keeping patients on their prescriptions and understanding a therapy's efficacy. They may even work directly on a patient's care team. Pharmacists are already spending a lot of time on the phone – talking to physicians, insurance companies, patients, etc. They're typically easy to get on the phone and happy to engage in a scientific exchange of information.

Lucky for the rep, Pharmacists are information-hungry. Reps should prioritize including Pharmacists in their TOCs. **Pharmacy Technicians** act like a gatekeeper for the Pharmacist, but they're a valuable source for information. They often have a lot of great information on prescription habits like how often a drug has been purchased or ordered. **Pharmacy Purchasers** also holds information about drug orders and can hold the decision-making power to stock a product on the pharmacy's shelves. They're also often the ones communicating with wholesalers to process drug orders.

We've seen a trend lately, particularly in Oncology and Hospital products, where the Pharmacists have been incredibly open to engaging. They're incredibly knowledgeable on treatment protocol and they have value clinical information. Pharmacists are proving to be a portal to getting to many critical areas and stakeholders in a practice or institution.

This is a prime example of how reps should be hyper alert of any treatment team member that can open a door to a prescriber.



With so many players in the TOC field, you're probably thinking, 'does the total office call require more than one rep?'

No, the traditional sales rep just needs a new set of skills.

The Solution

Different skills for a different approach

Here lies a unique opportunity to develop a more customer-centric, effective, and efficient engagement model for Medical Affairs & Commercial alike. Every contact is valuable – re-define the metrics you're using to measure successful interactions. Instead of focusing on getting past the gatekeeper, the rep must engage the gatekeeper and other office staff members. The representative can do this successfully by mapping out stakeholders in advance, preparing appropriate questions and messaging for each type of stakeholder, and then confirming role, responsibilities, and credentials to ensure they address everyone appropriately and compliantly.

Successfully deploying the TOC model is proven to increase effective, impactful, and compliant virtual interactions. TOC allows pharma to master the art of remote engagement and learn specific techniques, language, and phrases to incorporate conviction into their virtual discussions leading to better experiences for all.



Amplity's Remote Engagement Solutions

At Amplity Health, we know what it takes to bridge communication gaps to increase the frequency in which we engage with HCPs. Whether you're looking to upskill your existing sales teams or partner with us to overlay your field sales channel, we can help with:

- Stakeholder mapping
- Phone navigation
- Remote engagement communication skills
- Engaging with the gatekeeper to uncover valuable information and build rapport
- Leveraging those relationships with the gate keeper and other office personnel to extend the call and eventually reach the target customer (Doctor)
- Collaborating with other client teams to relay all valuable information and help improve their access

Ready to discuss how we can partner? [Click here to contact us.](#)

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