

Top Story

Help Physicians Crack the Correct Case: ThinkGen's Best Practices for Patient Profiles Testing

By Noah M. Pines and Audrey Wu, ThinkGen

Introduction: Getting HCPs to See YOUR Patient Is Increasingly Difficult!

Helping healthcare providers (HCPs) match the right patient to a specific product is an increasingly challenging task for the pharmaceutical marketer. ThinkGen's [Habit LensSM framework](#) was developed because today's overworked HCPs have limited time with patients and rely on ingrained rules-of-thumb to determine their treatment choice for particular patients. This behavior is increasingly reinforced by "corporate medicine," which encourages HCPs to maximize profitability by limiting patient interactions and treatment options.

ThinkGen's Habit LensSM studies demonstrate that pharmaceutical marketers too often convert the differentiated aspects of their product's profile into cues - and may inadvertently reinforce the habitual behavior that the marketer is trying to change. We encourage our clients to re-examine cues within the context of a Habit CycleSM, and then strategically re-frame cues to motivate HCPs to trial the treatment in specific patient types.

Specific patient types need to be crystal clear to the customer to enact a brand utilization habit. While patient profiles can be an effective tool for presenting specific patient types, they must adhere to promotional guidelines. Patient characteristics must be aligned with those of the patients for which a treatment or therapy is approved - specifically, those studied in the products' clinical trials and consistent with the FDA-approved labeling. Brand teams are increasingly restricted from providing directive information or characteristics in patient profiles.

As with our [Customer-Driven Positioning](#) methodology, when ThinkGen tests patient profiles, our focus is on understanding how customers think about the brand's story. ThinkGen's systematic, disciplined approach combines primary marketing research, data analytics support, and our Habit LensSM framework to help ensure patient profiles fulfill the brand team's communications and commercial objectives.

Step 1:

Decision Architecture and Patient Chart Review

The first step in developing effective patient profiles is to establish a thorough analysis of current HCP treatment behavior, typically led by the market research and data analytics teams. Taking this first step creates an opportunity to meaningfully advance the brand team's understanding of how HCPs think about therapeutic approaches throughout the market research project.

In addition to in-house data, market research teams commission exploratory marketing research or rely on expert advisory boards to understand these decision-making factors and dynamics more deeply. A patient chart review study is also an effective way to glean further insights into actual treatment decision behavior.

Patient profiles drafted for testing are typically given a name and image to lend a sense of authenticity, personalization, and empathy. They feature the patient's medical history, results of laboratory testing and/or imaging, non-medical details about their personal lives, and even their hobbies or other preferences.

When deciding on a treatment, HCPs might also weigh non-clinical characteristics such as a patient's family situation, caregiver support, personal preferences, lifestyle, and insurance coverage. Co-morbidities and concomitantly administered medications also play a role in an HCP's consideration of a patient's candidacy for a particular medication. For example, in considering

FirstWord PHARMA+

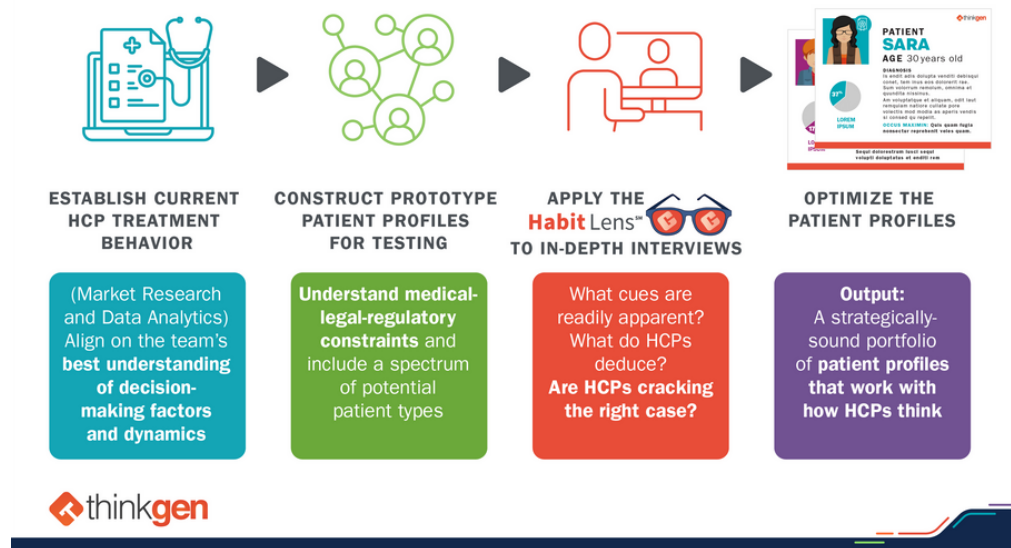
Pharma+ ▾ News ▾ Insight, Analysis & Views ▾ StoryWatch ▾ Events Resources More FW ▾

whether a patient is likely to be adherent to an oral medication, the HCP might be more inclined to prescribe it if they see that a patient is regularly taking other oral medications for another condition, and whether that other condition is well-controlled.

From here, the team will construct a range of prototype patient profiles for testing in primary marketing research, as well as to validate the critical decision-making criteria. We recommend that teams include a spectrum of potential patient types, spanning from those considered the more obvious cases where an HCP might use their brand, to the reach cases where the HCP may not be as inclined to use the brand, but that are still within the scope of labeling or clinical trials. This gives the sales representatives an opportunity to choose the profiles most relevant to the HCP's practice and customize a conversation based on the HCP's adoption of the treatment.

ThinkGen's Patient Profiles Testing Methodology: Help HCPs Crack the Case

DISCUSSION FLOW AND STIMULI



Step 2: Iterative Profile Testing Using an Interactive Digital Platform

We at ThinkGen typically recommend a qualitative research methodology that involves in-depth interviews (or mini group sessions) with target customers. We advocate for remote interviews using an interactive digital research platform due to time efficiency and greater ease of respondent recruitment. The platform allows the respondent to interact with the stimuli - i.e., the product profile and patient profiles - to discern respondents' immediate reaction, the features that stand out, and/or the decision that a respondent would render given that specific patient type.

For a launch brand, we strive to recruit based upon our client's specified target segments as dictated by a typing tool. This helps to determine if there are differential reactions to the patient profiles by segment. For in-line brands, we often sample from adopters, "dabblers," and/or non-adopters to determine if there are differential reactions to the profiles by segment.

In structuring the research exercise, we start the interview with a discussion of current knowledge and practices and then turn to reviewing key decision-making criteria. We utilize a proprietary digital platform to walk respondents through several quick exercises in which they are asked to group decision criteria - product characteristics or patient characteristics - into buckets depending on how essential they are to the HCP's treatment choice. Respondents then are exposed to a product profile and asked for high-level reactions.

Next, the main exercise involves respondents reviewing and reacting to (both spontaneously and in-depth) a series of patient profiles to address several important questions:

- ***What would they do for a patient like this today, and why?***
- ***How good of a fit would this patient be for the product under consideration, and why?***
- ***What are the characteristics and features that make the product a fit, or not?***
- ***How strongly does the HCP feel about using the product for this particular patient?***

Using the proprietary digital platform, our research team can pinpoint specific elements of the profile that are most predictive of adoption, as well as those which are "off target" in that they either confuse or confound the decision. HCPs provide snap ratings of likelihood to prescribe as well as highlight elements of the case that are compelling or confusing. It is the job of the moderator to probe and reveal more deeply the why's, and determine which factors are truly in favor of the client's brand.

Applying ThinkGen's Habit LensSM as HCPs Instinctively Try to "Crack the Case"

When presented with a patient profile, HCPs instinctively try to "crack the case" - i.e., determine how the patient got to where they are, what the patient's problems are, and what is most pressing to solve. By applying our Habit LensSM framework, ThinkGen researchers can understand both the cues that are readily apparent in each profile and what HCPs deduce from the information provided. We then determine how to structure profiles that work with how physicians naturally think about patient cases.

Research like this often is iterative, especially as the team learns what attributes are truly relevant to the product decision. We often find that HCPs "crack the wrong case" - i.e., solve for something completely irrelevant to the product in question. This happens when a case has too much information, unnecessary details, and/or unrealistic characteristics. For example, if a particular laboratory value is too high or too low, HCPs try to figure out what happened - was the patient inappropriately treated? Was the patient non-adherent to follow-up visits? If those are irrelevant to the product at hand, the profile needs to be restructured.

The team also needs to consider how these profiles eventually will be used in promoting to target HCPs as part of an omnichannel campaign. While historically, patient profiles have been presented in personal selling by sales reps, more and more promotion is shifting to non-personal and digital promotion. This underscores the need for the clues and cues presented in a patient case to be realistic and unmistakably clear.

FirstWord PHARMA+

[Pharma+](#) ▾ [News](#) ▾ [Insight, Analysis & Views](#) ▾ [StoryWatch](#) ▾ [Events](#) [Resources](#) [More FW](#) ▾

Case Study: Patient Profiles for a New Product

The team at ThinkGen tested patient profiles constructed by a client preparing to launch a product for a serious, rare lung disease. Study respondents reviewed a target product profile (TPP) prior to evaluating the draft patient profiles. Reacting to the data in isolation via the TPP, the respondents' instinct was to reserve our client's product for the most treatment refractory cases of this lung condition.

ThinkGen's iterative approach enabled a clear understanding of how HCPs think about clinical data in the context of the patient in front of them. The existing cue was severity: specifically, how quickly the patient was progressing. Taking into consideration other aspects of the product's clinical profile, our client determined that the new cue needed to be the motivated patient. The research provided insight about what HCPs needed to hear directly from the patient to categorize that patient as motivated.

Conclusion

Our goal at ThinkGen is to support brand teams in their customer understanding and enactment of successful commercial approaches through systematic primary marketing research methods and techniques. Overlaying our Habit LensSM to patient profiles testing helps ensure that the cues embedded in the profiles are strategically and intentionally considered.

In our research experience, we have found that HCPs enjoy reviewing patient cases since they trigger the HCP's natural problem-solving instincts that are a feature of their everyday job. However, when profiles aren't created effectively through a systematic and rigorous process - one that involves a deep understanding of both the medical and non-medical features that comprise the HCP's decision architecture - they may not stimulate the choice the team intends.

An effectively constructed patient profile helps the HCP build a habit of associating a specific confluence of signals from the patient with the product or brand and is the starting point of a successful trial and eventual repeated usage. It is therefore crucial to follow a disciplined path, iterating based upon insights gleaned along the way, to identify the clear triggers to usage; and to assemble a strategically sound portfolio of authentic, personal profiles that can be deployed as part of an omnichannel campaign.

About the Authors



Noah M. Pines is the Founder & CEO of ThinkGen, a global marketing research and brand strategy consultancy dedicated to helping life science companies develop and commercialize life-improving treatments. With 30+ years

Noah leads a team of all-star researchers at ThinkGen. He has authored over 50 publications on therapeutic topics and research methodologies, and has spearheaded the development of several proprietary methods. Noah was the 2020 Intellus Clement-Fordyce recipient and named to the PharmaVOICE List of 2019's 100 Most Inspiring People.



Audrey Wu, Vice President, has over 20 years of experience as a commercial leader in the pharma industry. She has led numerous brand and launch plans from the manufacturer, agency, and insights perspectives. An MIT engineer

with 4 patents who was awarded a Rising Star by the Healthcare Businesswomen's Association in 2019, Audrey is a founding innovator of ThinkGen's Habit LensSM framework and methodology.

To learn more about ThinkGen, please visit <http://think-gen.com>.