



## Physicians drive vaccine dialogue

Recorded patient-physician conversations provide an understanding of how vaccines are discussed at doctor's visits and identify communication needs.

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Vaccines are anticipated to be one of the fastest-growing segments of the pharmaceutical market between 2008 and 2023. Analysts believe that new legislation, advancements in science, and enhanced vaccine awareness are contributing to vaccines growth, particularly in the United States. Recent growth of vaccines, such as sales of **Merck & Co.**'s blockbuster cervical cancer vaccine **Gardasil**, are being attributed to increased vaccine awareness and robust advertising campaigns. Despite increased awareness among consumers, vaccines continue to be largely a physician-driven topic in doctor's offices. Effective communications in this area will come from establishing a balance between the medical and the interpersonal agenda of the doctor's visits.

According to Jeff Kozloff, president and CEO, **Verilogue** ([verilogue.com](http://verilogue.com)), vaccines often times are not the primary reason for an office visit, but rather a side conversation. Despite more activity in the press and in commercials, the topic is still very much a physician-generated conversation.

"Obviously we do see somewhat higher rates for more of the branded vaccines who are patient generated, but this is still largely physician driven discussion," Mr. Kozloff told *Med Ad News*. "It's important that the industry and marketers can take a look at both customers, docs and patients to better support them and equip them with information so that when they enter that physician patient dialogue they can have the most productive conversation."

Verilogue collects information on an ongoing basis and captures when vaccines are being discussed, how they are being discussed, and what affect that plays on the overall continuum of care conversation. Patients are likely to comply with their doctor recommendations for the standard vaccines such as tetanus, diphtheria, and meningitis, but with newer, non-standard vaccinations patients are looking for strong, subjective personal endorsement from their physician when the vaccination is both necessary as well as safe.

"From a communication perspective, this underscores the importance of trust and interpersonal dynamics," Mr. Kozloff says. "That's an area for effective communications where finding that balance between the medical and the interpersonal agenda of the clinical visit is very important."

Pharmaceutical clients can benefit by using patient-doctor conversations from a training perspective to ground field forces in the reality of the physician-patient discussion. In addition, discussions are valuable from a messaging standpoint. According to Mr. Kozloff, one of the key challenges is making sure that conversation is not only occurring, but that patients are getting that treatment during that visit.

“Some of these vaccines are routine, there’s a unilateral decision made by the physician and there’s not much discussion,” Mr. Kozloff says. “Then there are other vaccines, which may be considered that next tier, where it’s all about the discussion and it’s all about the support and the persuasiveness and that interpersonal style that the physician uses that gets the patient to buy in.”

According to Verilogue’s research, some doctors use various persuasive strategies to get the patients to buy in to that treatment. These could be interpersonal strategies like using empathy or alliance building. Or, they use more clinical strategies, such as peer examples and recommendations. Mr. Kozloff says that with some of the newer vaccines, or branded vaccines, there tends to be more of a highly persuasive discussion where the doctors to a degree are trying to sell the patients on the vaccine.

“You do see a lot more patient resistance, so that’s where the communication is really important,” Mr. Kozloff says.