

Case study:

Elite sales force exceeds targets by over 200%

HayGroup[®]

When Shire Pharmaceuticals began to think about how to market ELAPRASE™, the first and only treatment for a rare medical condition, it quickly realized it needed a special kind of salesperson. It was able to recruit a first rate sales team quickly and topped initial sales goals by more than 200%.



“I was looking for distinct and unique competencies. We needed to be empathetic, but we didn’t want to risk being sympathetic. We had to make sure our people didn’t burn out.”

Andrew Komjathy, VP
Commercial Operations,
Shire Pharmaceuticals

Identifying “distinct and unique competencies”

ELAPRASE is an “orphan drug” that treats people afflicted with Hunter syndrome, a rare, life-threatening genetic condition that results in the loss of a vital enzyme, affecting about 500 people in the U.S. ELAPRASE, administered in weekly infusions, replaces the enzyme. With so few cases, selling the treatment requires becoming extremely close to individual patients and their families. Not all salespeople have the emotional resiliency for that. And not all salespeople can handle a large 10-state territory that requires extensive travel, or manage relations with infusion centers where the drug would be administered.

Shire Pharmaceuticals VP of Commercial Operations Andrew Komjathy turned to Hay Group to help identify other competencies, and to design a pay and incentive structure for the job.

His goals were:

- Becoming the gold standard in orphan drug sales forces
- Building an elite sales organization that is easily duplicable and transferable to other orphan drug products
- Very low turnover

Putting good research and effective data to use for the client

Hay Group conducted in-depth interviews with Shire’s medical director, its HR department, its executive management team, and outside experts. We designed a competency model with characteristics of the ideal salesperson for this product, with very different characteristics than the typical Shire sales professional.

Using proprietary benchmark data, Hay Group proposed a mix of base pay and a two-tier incentive system where salespeople were rewarded for both identifying patients and for vials shipped.

“Before we could sell,” said Komjathy, “we had to find out where the patients were, and match them to infusion centers. There isn’t one person I hired that I regret hiring,” said Komjathy. “We made 11 offers for 10 positions. They love the job,” he said, adding that turnover is very low. “We built an elite sales force that can sell any pharmaceutical product, including orphan drugs.”