

HEALOGIX Headlines™

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Individualized Oncology and Market Research

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Over the past several years, oncology—like other fields within medicine—has increasingly moved toward a more individualized approach to treating patients. Several factors have contributed to this development, including the availability of newer targeted agents and the increasing accessibility of large-scale genomic sequencing.

Targeted therapies and immunotherapies

Chemotherapy, the backbone of medical cancer therapy for decades, has been supplemented—and in some cases, supplanted—in recent years by the advent of therapies designed to target abnormalities specific to, or primarily found on or in, cancer cells and therapies that increase anti-tumor immune activity. While targeted therapies, such as monoclonal antibodies or small-molecule tyrosine kinase inhibitors (TKIs), are used broadly in some cancers where genetic abnormalities are commonplace, in others, targeted therapies are used only for a small subset of patients whose tumors express a given target or genetic abnormality. Similarly, in some tumors and settings, expression of a protein (PD-L1) secreted by malignant cells is used to determine eligibility for one type of immune therapy (PD-1 or PD-L1 inhibitors), and thus testing for a tumor's level of PD-L1 expression may be required for usage of these agents.

Testing for oncologic targets

Because the use of targeted therapies is limited to a particular subset of patients whose tumors express a particular marker or receptor, or have (or do not have) a particular mutation, tumor samples must be tested, a process that is managed by pathologists. Traditionally, testing has been performed via single-analyte methods, in which a tumor sample is evaluated for the presence of a single marker. More recently, next-generation sequencing (NGS), which can test for multiple genomic abnormalities simultaneously, has become more commonplace as the cost has dropped and insurers have become more willing to cover it.

Consequences for market researchers

The proliferation of targeted therapies and the increasing

individualization of treatment have several consequences for market researchers. Therapies that are indicated based on the presence of a genetic alteration rather than on a specific tumor type have changed the paradigm of oncology care. As researchers, we have had to adopt an entirely new vocabulary and way of conceptualizing our questions in order to ensure that we continue to engage in meaningful dialogues with our respondents. In some cancers, there are multiple subtypes defined by expression of tumor markers, which should be treated with different approaches. Both qualitative interviews and quantitative survey instruments must take these subgroups and their specific treatment options into account.

Additionally, the increasing importance of genomic testing has meant incorporating novel audiences into market research studies. Pathologists and lab directors play a crucial role in determining patient eligibility for targeted therapies. Although these physicians do not make treatment decisions, their awareness of tests and the availability of novel therapies are critical to uptake of these agents.

Targeted therapies can also raise medico-economic questions that market researchers may need to address. Novel therapies tend to be expensive, and genomic testing increases costs to the medical system and to the patient. Many targeted therapies are oral, and the cost of oral therapies—to the patient and to the practice—must be taken into account. In this context, it often becomes relevant to include practice managers or nurses, who are responsible for managing reimbursement and insurance issues, and to recognize the cost to the patient or to the practice as one driver of treatment decisions.

As cancer treatment has evolved due to the availability of newer targeted and immunotherapeutic agents and the increasing accessibility of large-scale genomic sequencing, so too has the structure and scale of oncology market research. We researchers have had to adopt a more expansive perspective to broaden our audiences to include others critical to the treatment decision-making process and to widen the focus of our research to include the ever-changing cost implications of targeted and oral therapies. •

Healogix is committed to the health and safety of our employees, families, and entire community as we continue to provide services for our clients

In these unprecedented times due to COVID-19, we want to send a message of support and reassurance to our clients.



The Healogix team is working remotely and is fully operational. We are connected with our trusted recruitment partners to keep projects running smoothly, and we are working closely with our clients to support their business needs in this new environment.



For the safety of our colleagues and communities, in-person qualitative research is not feasible at this time. However, Healogix has multiple strategies to replace in-person qual including webcam-enabled interviews, web-assisted TDIs, and mobile ethnography to get our clients the insights they need.

Take care and stay safe. We will make it through this together!

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Did You Know?

STATE TRIVIA

Test your US state knowledge with these five trivia questions. Let us know how you do!

1. This state has a population smaller than six American cities. Yet it's the largest producer of toothpicks in the country.

- A. Vermont
- B. New Hampshire
- C. Maine
- D. Rhode Island

2. This southern state was the last one to secede during the Civil War, the first to be readmitted to the Union, and is bordered by eight other states.

- A. Alabama
- B. Tennessee
- C. West Virginia
- D. Kentucky

3. Kool-Aid was invented here, as was the Reuben sandwich, but the state's most beloved native food is the runza—a pastry stuffed with ground beef and cabbage.

- A. Nebraska
- B. North Dakota
- C. South Dakota
- D. Kansas

4. One-quarter of the country's llama population lives in this state, which also boasts the world's largest cheese factory and more than 750 vineyards.

- A. Washington
- B. California
- C. Oregon
- D. Idaho

5. This state has given the world the first electric guitar, the first parking meter, and the first shopping cart. It's also home to more than 200 man-made lakes—more than anywhere else.

- A. Oklahoma
- B. Arizona
- C. Nevada
- D. New Mexico

ANSWERS:

- 1: C** Maine
- 2: B** Tennessee
- 3: A** Nebraska
- 4: C** Oregon
- 5: A** Oklahoma



Do you have a story idea for our next newsletter? Send thoughts to ed.siebert@healogix.com