Exploring Biogen's Failed Crisis Response Efforts in 2019 and Their Current Repositioning Efforts in the Alzheimer's Community

EXPERT

Losing the Industry's Trust - Biogen's Poor Crisis Response Efforts in 2019

In 2019, Biogen shocked the world by abruptly shutting down aducanumab trials for Alzheimer's treatment. Across the globe, trials were jolted to a halt.

Research partners were left stunned with little word from Biogen past the orders to pull the plug. Clinical trial participants were left in an objectively worse condition. Patients were quite literally in the middle of receiving infusions when word came in that studies must be stopped.

In the following months, researchers from more than 350 trial sites received little to no information from Biogen. Participants received even less. Over 3,000 were informed that the study had failed, with no next step.

Patient communities, especially those with neurodegenerative conditions, must be approached with sensitivity and care. Pharmaceutical companies seek to solve patients' unmet needs ultimately. Therefore, a higher level of corporate responsibility is placed on these entities, which includes providing patients with sufficient resources.

Biogen did not take the opportunity to preserve end-user relationships by providing key resources to make the transition easier for former study participants. Instead, Biogen's response effectively "devasted" the Alzheimer's community, according to Bloomberg, leaving multiple stakeholders in the dark. The drug candidate was essentially doomed from this point on.

Just months later, Biogen surprisingly reversed its decision, setting plans to apply for FDA approval. Scientists were left puzzled by the idea that data deemed a failure just a few months ago was now considered a potential breakthrough indication.

Despite winning FDA approval in 2021, Aduhelm (the commercial name for aducanumab) was met with industry skepticism. The sense of trust and hope that scientists, patients, and even FDA advisory board members once had was shattered in the wake of Biogen's 2019 crisis response.

However, Biogen has learned from its mistakes. Currently, the company is recovering from the overall failure of Aduhelm, seeking to rebuild trust within the Alzheimer's community.

Lessons Learned - 2022 Crisis Response Revamps Biogen's Potential Leadership Within AZ Sphere

On May 3, 2022, Biogen changed course. After a poor crisis response in 2019 and subsequent industry ripples over the past two years, Biogen is seeking to "substantially eliminate" ties with Aduhelm, according to Fierce Pharma. Biogen's CEO was overhauled, as was the Aduhelm commercial team.

One day later, on May 4, 2022, Biogen flipped the narrative by focusing on hope for the future and the lessons learned through the Aduhelm experience. The two article features with Fierce Pharma were strategically published during Biogen's 2022 crisis response initiatives.

The decision was met with praise by industry analysts, highlighting Biogen's ability to "make tough decisions" by cutting losses and focussing on future developments. Taking action to restructure a team is a crucial signal to external parties that significant company changes are underway. The strategy is part of an attempt by Biogen to rebrand its image within the global Alzheimers community.

To truly demonstrate the difference between Aduhelm and lecanemab, Biogen is directly calling them out. This time around, Biogen's partner, Eisai will lead the regulatory process, including filing.

Previously, Biogen had led this step, garnering a negative reputation in the area. Enabling Eisai to take the need demonstrates to the public the clear steps Biogen is taking to avoid another Aduhelm situation.

In addition, the positioning is different. While Aduhelm was given rapid, highly questioned FDA approval, Biogen is taking a longer route with lecanemab to ensure efficacy. According to Fierce Pharma, the drug candidate is being positioned with the potential to "become the first anti-amyloid antibody to obtain **full approval** for Alzheimer's disease in the U.S."

The keywords within that positioning statement? "Full approval." Biogen is not seeking to cut corners this time with expedited processes. The business is communicating to the industry that they are taking time to ensure validity for Alzheimer's patients.

Key Takeaways for Alzheimer's Treatment Developers - Proceed with Caution and Plan Your Crisis Communication Strategies in Advance

As Biogen demonstrates, appropriate crisis responses are critical. Pharmaceutical developers must consider backups when clinical trials do not go as planned. Creating a crisis response plan will help ensure that patient groups are not devasted and left with a lack of support options when data results are not as expected.

It takes years to build a positive reputation within patient and partner groups. The same reputation can be destroyed with one wrong decision.

Although Biogen's strategies to rebuild trust within key stakeholder groups are receiving positive reception thus far, only time will tell if they can effectively rebrand themselves in this sphere.

- Content by the BDMT Global Team

If you are interested in potential partnerships and long-term relationships with the companies mentioned in this article or others in the U.S. and/or S. Korea, contact Suzy at sim@bdmtglobal.com.

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