

DON'T GET LEFT BEHIND

**FOUR ESSENTIAL THINGS PHARMA MANAGERS
MUST MASTER BEFORE YEAR-END**



This report has been prepared for the exclusive use of registrants to the 2026 Spring Webinar, and provides a summary of the Webinar

In an era of rapid change, how can pharma managers stay ahead when they don't know exactly what's around the corner?

On June 10, the National Pharmaceutical Congress (NPC) Spring Webinar brought together industry experts to talk about the four essentials pharma managers need to master before year end— hybrid workplaces, direct patient strategy, AI, and real agility. Here are the highlights of the discussion.

FROM BOARDROOM TO KITCHEN TABLE—THE NEW HYBRID WORKPLACE

“The Covid-19 pandemic really changed the psychological contract between employers and employees,” said Rodrigo Reis, General Manager, UCB Canada Inc. “Pre-pandemic management often relied on physical presence, hours worked, and direct supervision of the personal. But employees proved that many forms of knowledge work could be done effectively outside of the office.”

This has led to a workplace defined by trust, not control, he added. “Recent data from Gallup shows that the hybrid remains the preferred model for many employees. Now employees expect to have a clearly defined purpose when they come to the office. There’s no point in sitting in a room and not interacting with other people in the office—and I think that’s the real change we need to address.”

While he emphasized that face-to-face interaction still matters for activities such as planning sessions, strategic alignment, and innovation discussions, he cautioned against rigid return-to-office mandates.

“We’re seeing a lot of employee pushback on the traditional nine-to-five model. At UCB, we’re already adopting a hybrid model that states employees should be working in-person 40 per cent of the time, and 60 per cent remote, which averages to two days a week at the office. This gives employees the flexibility on how they want to manage their in-person time.”

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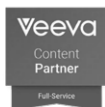
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THE PATIENT HAS CHANGED—HAS PHARMA?

For Sandra Heller, General Manager at Astellas Pharma, one of the biggest shifts is that patients are no longer just recipients of care, but informed participants. “They’re digital users and taking a more active role in navigating our fragmented system. According to Statistics Canada information, approximately 37 per cent of Canadians use a combination of virtual and in-person care throughout the year.”

While patients are more informed than ever, they are also increasingly overwhelmed, she noted.

“With patients arriving with their own data and research, physicians often spend valuable appointment time correcting misleading information. And when these appointments are already short and the system is fragmented, it’s hard for both the patient and healthcare professionals.”

There are also limits to what can be accomplished in a virtual environment. “For example, my doctor isn’t going to notice that I’m hobbling, unless I walk through the door.”

What does this mean for pharma?

“Pharma managers need to take a close look at what patients and clinicians really need and map out potential solutions,” she advised. “In some cases, it will be omnichannel, in others, face-to-face time in an office.”

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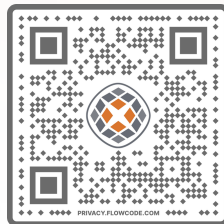
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WILL AI MAKE ME IRRELEVANT?

Not according to Tom Slowe, CEO of Breadcrumbs Analytics in Buffalo, N.Y., a start-up that was founded to address the burden of managing and interpreting immense, often disorganized datasets. He sees AI as a tool that can enhance human expertise, rather than replace it.

“AI should be raising the bar on what we can expect from our healthcare,” he said. “Currently it’s difficult for a provider to consistently recall a specific patient’s health care every single time. Many of the inefficiencies in the system stem from lack of continuity, understanding, and coordination.”

Addressing these inefficiencies will also require greater attention to the social determinants of healthcare. “AI doesn’t learn from reality—it learns from data, much of which comes from our healthcare system. As a result, many of biases within our system, including socioeconomic disparities, may be reflected in the AI program.”

He also emphasized that that claims about AI’s transformative potential should be viewed with a critical eye.

“Be the adult in the room. Don’t be impressed by the presentation. Many of these tools are chatbots that are designed to make you happy, but that doesn’t mean that they’re always right. AI is like having 10 million three-year olds that are each given a very simple task. Together they can do some pretty amazing things, but completely lack the life experience to truly understand what they are doing.”

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TOM SLOWE
CEO
BREADCRUMB ANALYTICS





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To get the best use of AI, he advised using it actively, every day.

“You can think of it a bit like a junior employee or intern. Sometimes it can be really amazing, and sometimes it can be really dumb. The only way to understand its strengths and weaknesses is to use it on a daily basis and see how it succeeds—and how it makes mistakes.”

AGILITY MATTERS—PUTTING IT IN PRACTICE

“It’s about being more intentional,” said Benoit Lemelin, Global People Business Partner, Speciality Care, Sanofi. “It can’t just be a PowerPoint deck that comes from another country. To build agility muscles, I give my team specific agility labs.”

One example is what he calls a “next-generation leadership team for a day.”

“We give 12 key talents a business challenge and simulation, that forces them to be agile, creative, and quick in decision-making and thinking,” he said. However, he emphasized that leaders must be prepared to assess whether employees can adapt to changing demands.

“It’s about meeting people where they are and bringing them along,” he explained. “However, not everyone can make that shift. Sometimes leaders have to make a hard call. If the skills gap is too large, an individual may need to move somewhere else in the organization—or may ultimately not be the right fit for the organization.”

In an industry undergoing rapid transformation, he advised leaders not to ignore significant skills gaps for too long.

“Very often, a leader will say to me, ‘I wish I had made that tough call six months ago.’ This is my third big global pharma company, and I concur—it’s usually best to make those tough calls sooner rather than later.”

“It’s about meeting people where they are and bringing them along, however, not everyone can make that shift.”



BENOIT LEMELIN
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Date
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Type
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Time
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Bilal Javaid
Sr. Business Development Manager
Bilal.Javaid@inizio.com | +1 647 208 1613



Dave Cann
Sr. Director, Business Development
Dave.Cann@inizio.com | +1 416 579 2141



Suzanne Francoeur
Director, Business Development
Suz.Francoeur@inizio.com | +1 438 838 8425

2026 SPRING WEBINAR FACULTY



SANDRA HELLER
GENERAL MANAGER
ASTELLAS CANADA

For more than 25 years, Sandra Heller has had the privilege of working toward improving the lives of Canadians. As the new General Manager of Astellas Canada, she leads a dedicated team focused on improving the health of people through the provision of innovative pharmaceutical products.

Prior to Astellas Canada, Sandra was the General Manager of Seagen Canada where she witnessed the company's incredible transformation from a one-product company to having multiple products commercialized, further delivering on their mission to help improve the lives of people with cancer through targeted therapies.

Before joining Seagen, Sandra also worked for Gilead, Roche, and EMD Serono in various sales and marketing roles in therapeutic areas such as breast cancer, lung cancer, melanoma, bladder cancer, lymphomas, and multiple sclerosis. She also has extensive experience in patient support programs where she started her career.

As a leader, she's passionate about transformation, learning, collaboration, and the inspiring potential of science and innovation to make a meaningful difference in the lives of Canadians touched by cancer.

**BEN LEMELIN**

GLOBAL PEOPLE BUSINESS PARTNER, SPECIALTY CARE
SANOFI

Ben Lemelin is a seasoned People & Culture leader and executive coach currently serving as Global People Business Partner at Sanofi, where he supports several key Specialty Care business/functions, including Integrated Launch Capabilities, Global Oncology, Corporate Affairs, and Global Market Access.

With an extensive international track record spanning the pharmaceutical, professional services, private equity, and artificial intelligence sectors, Ben has led HR and talent strategies across up to 32 countries in Europe and the Americas. He brings deep expertise in executive coaching, culture transformation, organizational growth, M&A, leadership development, and succession planning.

Ben holds a Master of Business Administration focused on innovation from École des sciences de la gestion in Montreal and completed his undergraduate studies at McGill University. He has also completed the AI Executive Program at HEC Paris and is fluent in English, French, Spanish, and Italian.

**RODRIGO REIS**

GENERAL MANAGER
UCB CANADA INC.

Rodrigo Reis is a seasoned business professional with over 25 years of diverse experience in the pharmaceutical industry, currently leading UCB Canada Inc. operations as General Manager. Over the past two decades, Rodrigo has honed his skills in medical, marketing, and sales roles, gaining expertise in small molecules, biologics/vaccines, and rare diseases. His passion for improving patient lives is the driving force behind his remarkable journey.

Throughout his career, Rodrigo has worked in local, regional, and global roles, gaining significant experience in markets such as Brazil, Argentina, the United States, and now Canada, in leadership positions encompassing marketing, medical, and sales, and has also worked with policy and government affairs teams to advance policy in healthcare. This international exposure and diverse experience have enriched his understanding of diverse markets and business cultures.

Rodrigo joined UCB in Brazil in 2020, as Head of the Immunology business. After almost three years of a successful transformation, delivering double digit growth for three years in a row, Rodrigo was appointed as General Manager for Canada and relocated to the Greater Toronto Area with his family. Rodrigo holds a PharmD degree from the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, and an MBA from the Pontific Catholic University of Sao Paulo. This solid foundation has been instrumental in his professional journey.

Recently, Rodrigo has also been serving on the Board of Directors of two organizations: the pharma trade association Innovative Medicines Canada (IMC), where he chairs the Human Resources Committee, and the Belgium-Canadian Business Chamber (BCBC).

Beyond his professional interests, Rodrigo is a man of many passions. Music resonates deeply with him, and he spends his free time playing instruments. He also cherishes the company of his family, made up of his wife and two children. Rodrigo's background as a healthcare professional and his passion for positively impacting patient lives aligns perfectly with UCB's values.



THOMAS E. SLOWE
CEO
BREADCRUMB ANALYTICS

Thomas E. Slowe is CEO of Breadcrumb Analytics, a data and artificial intelligence company focused on making complex healthcare and research data verifiable, reproducible, and actionable. With more than 20 years of experience at the intersection of technology and business, he has led teams advancing the practical use of AI and data engineering in healthcare, media, advertising, and the public sector.

Tom's current work focuses on building AI and data pipelines that support label expansion, enhance transparency, reduce bias, simplify regulatory compliance, support SDOH, and anchor real-world evidence generation in the life sciences. He holds a Master's degree from the MIT Media Lab and a Bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering from Rutgers University.

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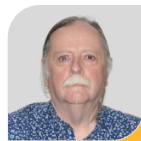


Since 2006, the National Pharmaceutical Congress (NPC) has provided a world-class stage for Canada's thought leaders in the pharmaceutical industry. The NPC Institute seeks to facilitate open dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders such as industry representatives, government officials, and healthcare providers to identify and recommend potential solutions to address challenges and promote sustainable growth and innovation in the life sciences sector.

For more information on the NPC Institute, please get in touch with us at health@chronicle.org or visit pharmacongress.info.



MITCH SHANNON
CEO AND PUBLISHER
SHANNON@CHRONICLE.ORG



R. ALLAN RYAN
VP AND EDITORIAL DIRECTOR
ALLAN@CHRONICLE.EMAIL



DANNI NEPOMUCENO
EVENT MANAGER
DANNI@CHRONICLE.ORG



CRISTELA TELLO RUIZ
CLIENT ENGAGEMENT &
PARTNERSHIPS COORDINATOR
CRISTELA@CHRONICLE.EMAIL



AMY ELDER
EVENTS & MULTIMEDIA COORDINATOR
ADMIN@CHRONICLE.EMAIL



JOHN EVANS
SENIOR EDITOR
JOHN@CHRONICLE.EMAIL



KYLIE REBERNIK
CONSULTANT
KYLIE@CHRONICLE.EMAIL



JEREMY VISSER
CO-ORDINATOR, DIGITAL
CONTENT & ENGAGEMENT
JEREMY@CHRONICLE.EMAIL



DARREN STALLMAN
CONSULTANT & SPECIAL PROJECTS
DARREN@CHRONICLE.ORG



PATRICK DELA PEÑA
PROJECT MANAGER
PATRICK@CHRONICLE.ORG

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1460 The Queensway, Suite 212
Etobicoke, ON M8Z 1S4, Canada

Phone: +1 (416) 916-2476
Fax: (416) 352-6199
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