

How AI Is Changing KOL Behavior

Adapting medical affairs engagement to evolving stakeholder expectations

With nearly 70% of HCPs using AI daily to get scientific information on patient care, AI is here to stay. How will this change in HCP behavior impact MSL engagement with key stakeholders?

As HCPs adopt an AI-first approach, medical affairs can no longer afford to maintain the status quo. To understand this shift, Veeva surveyed global key opinion leaders (KOLs) who use AI daily, to explore what they value most in their interactions with MSLs and how they see this engagement evolving. The key findings are compiled in the following report.

Current use of AI among physicians



67%

Use AI daily



89%

use AI weekly



84%

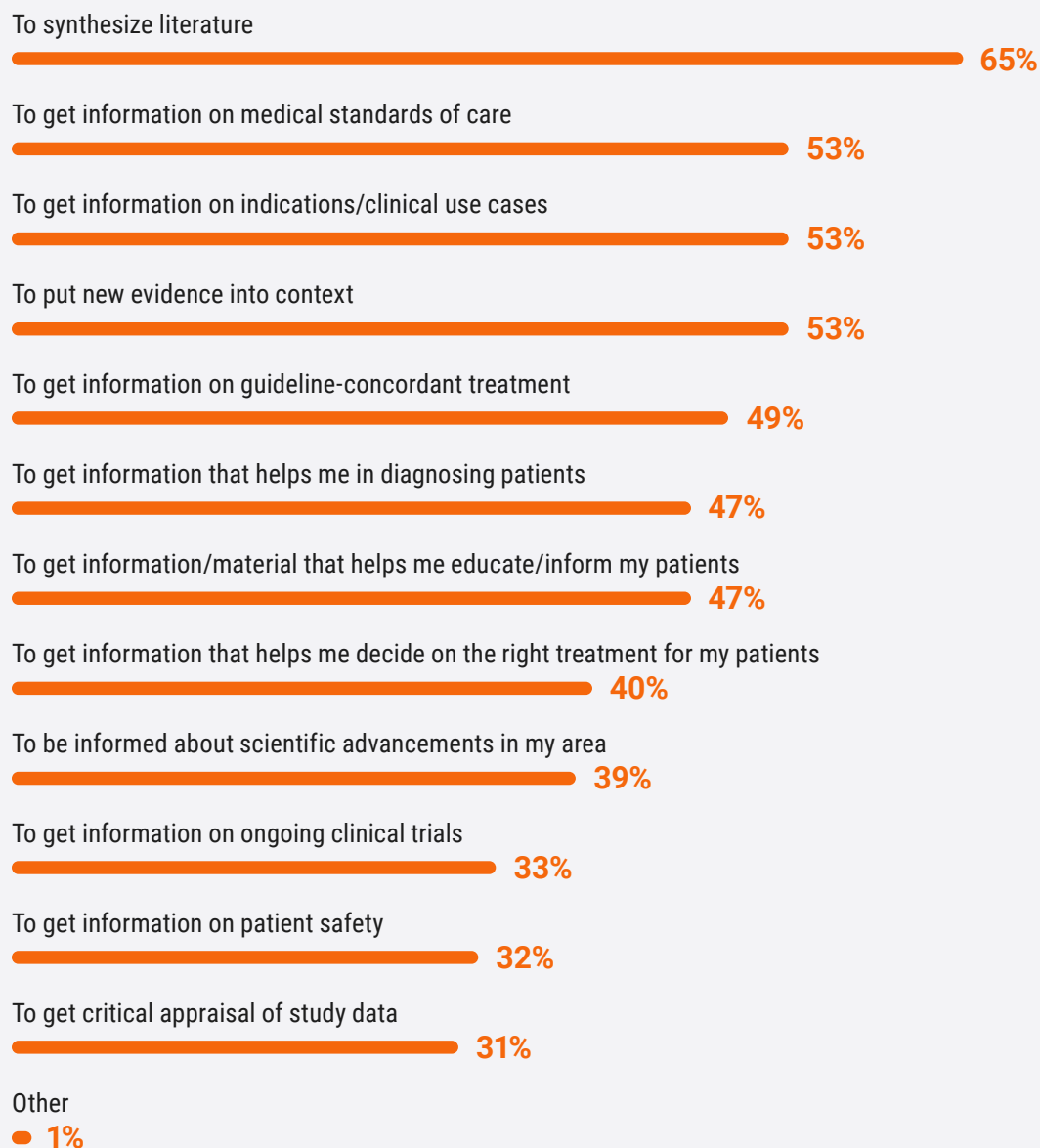
believe AI makes them better at their jobs

Source: [The 2025 Physicians AI Report](#)

How HCPs are using AI

KOLs consult AI applications mostly to synthesize literature, review medical standards of care, get information on indications and clinical use cases, and put new evidence into context. About half of KOLs surveyed use AI to gather information that helps them diagnose and treat patients.

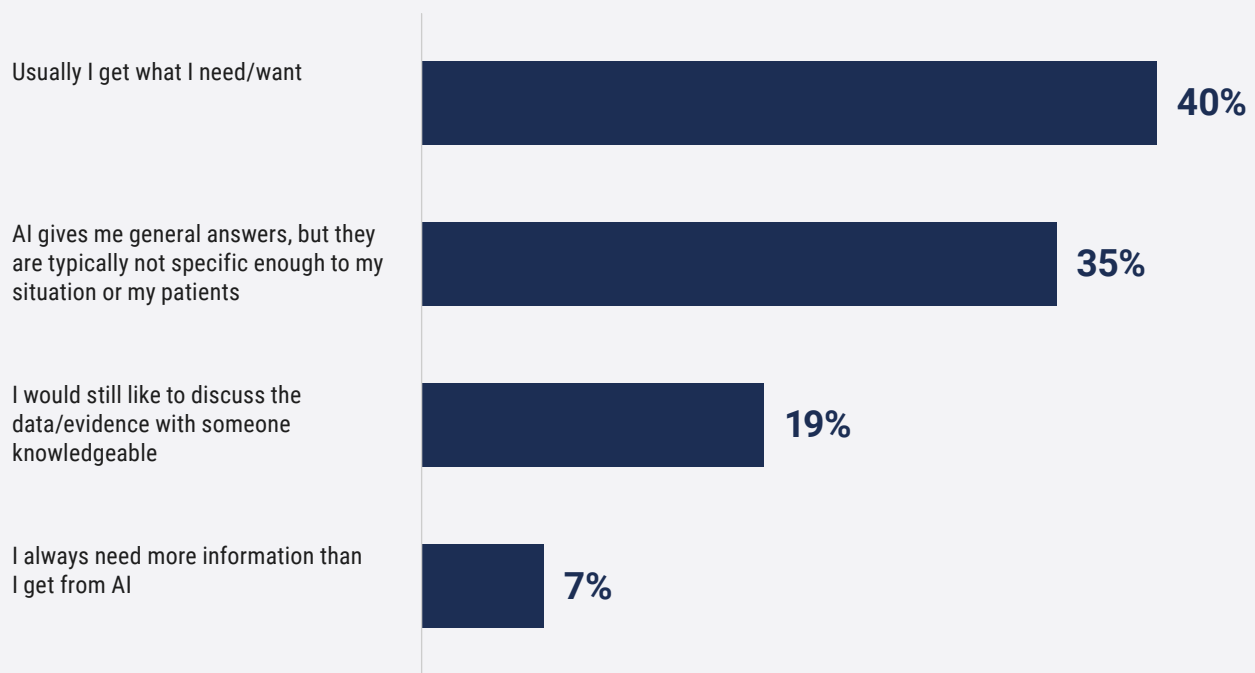
For which specific purposes do you typically consult AI tools or platforms?



AI delivers for some, but many are still searching

When using AI applications, 40% of KOLs get the information they need. However, 35% state that while they get relevant answers, they are not specific enough to their situation or patients. In addition, 20% of KOLs still want to discuss the data/evidence with someone knowledgeable.

After consulting AI, what is your typical need for additional information?



This signals a shift in traditional access that warrants a closer look. Some HCPs (40%) seeking scientific information will sooner ask AI what they previously consulted MSLs for. These findings do not explicitly suggest a closed door for medical affairs — only the need for a different entry point.

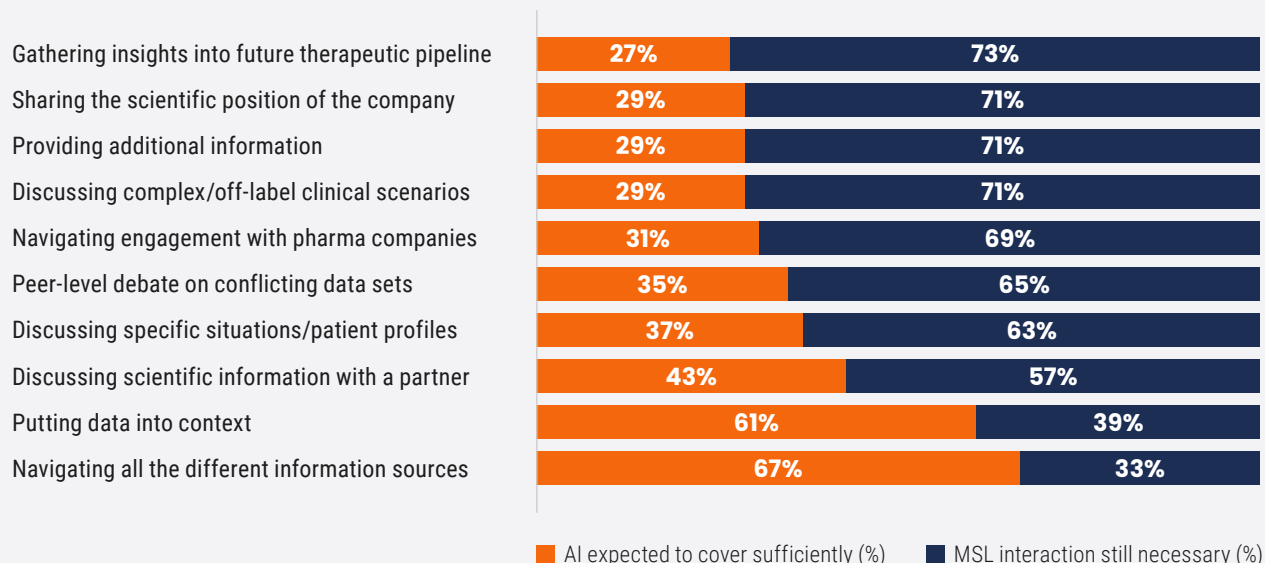
Despite this, the majority of KOLs (60%) still aren't getting everything they need from AI. This highlights an opportunity for MSLs to maintain their relationships, through deeper dialogue, filling in gaps and providing specialized answers that go beyond AI outputs.

The new MSL focus: Value beyond the LLM

Even as AI becomes more proficient, KOLs still rely on direct MSL interaction for certain activities. To gain deep insights into the corporate pipeline, nearly 75% of KOLs want to engage directly with an MSL. When it comes to understanding the scientific position of the company – or how the company interprets the evidence – and getting additional information on non-public data and complex or off-label scenarios, 71% of KOLs prefer having discussions with MSLs.

However, KOLs expect AI to sufficiently cover tasks such as putting data into context (61%) or navigating different data sources (67%).

As AI becomes more proficient at delivering scientific information, which activities do you expect direct interaction with an MSL to still be necessary?



Not surprisingly, KOLs are leveraging AI for what it does best – transactional data dissemination and synthesis at speed. MSLs who act only as neutral informants will quickly lose influence.

Conversely, MSLs who pivot away from the [status quo](#) toward areas that are gaining more importance will remain relevant.

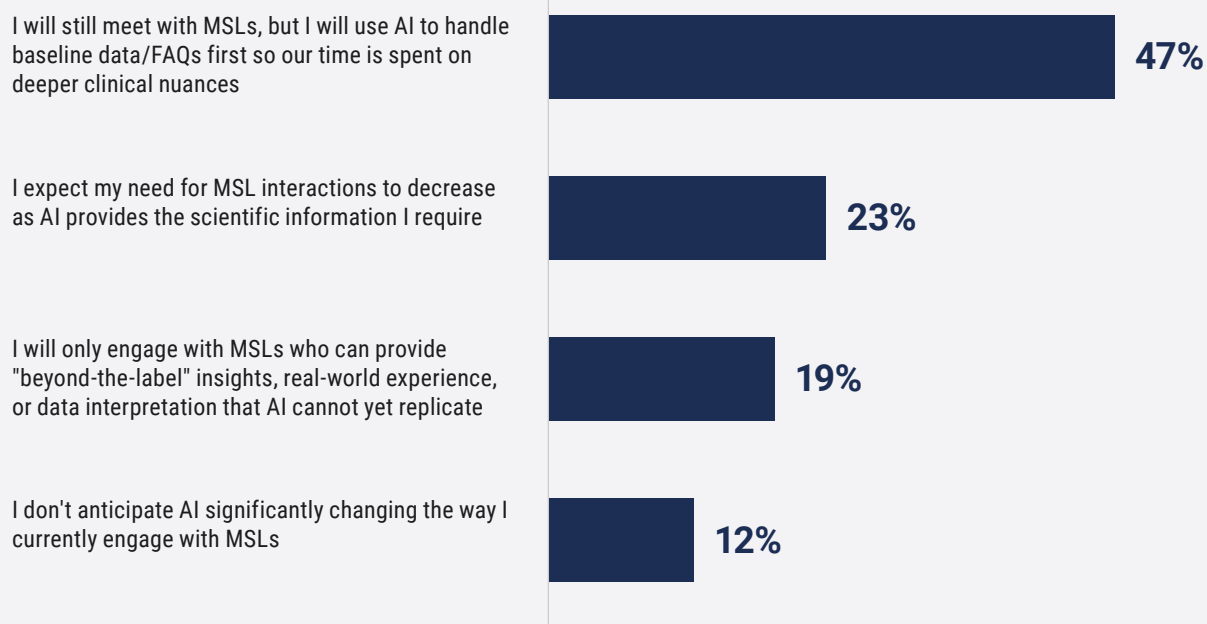
Adopting this approach may be a significant adjustment for some teams. Some believe that sharing a biopharma company's scientific position, defining a product's role in clinical practice, and discussing conflicting evidence falls outside the scope of medical affairs. The concern is these actions may be viewed as promotional or misaligned with KOL expectations.

Less frequent, but deeper scientific exchange

Only 12% of KOLs do not anticipate AI changing the way they currently engage with MSLs. However, the majority (88%) envision a change in their behavior when it comes to these interactions.

Nearly half of KOLs surveyed indicated they will still meet with MSLs, but use AI beforehand to gather information so that time spent can focus on deeper clinical nuances. Nineteen percent will only engage with MSLs on topics AI is not suited to cover, while 23% openly state that their interactions with MSLs will decrease.

How do you envision your interactions with MSLs changing in an AI-enabled environment?

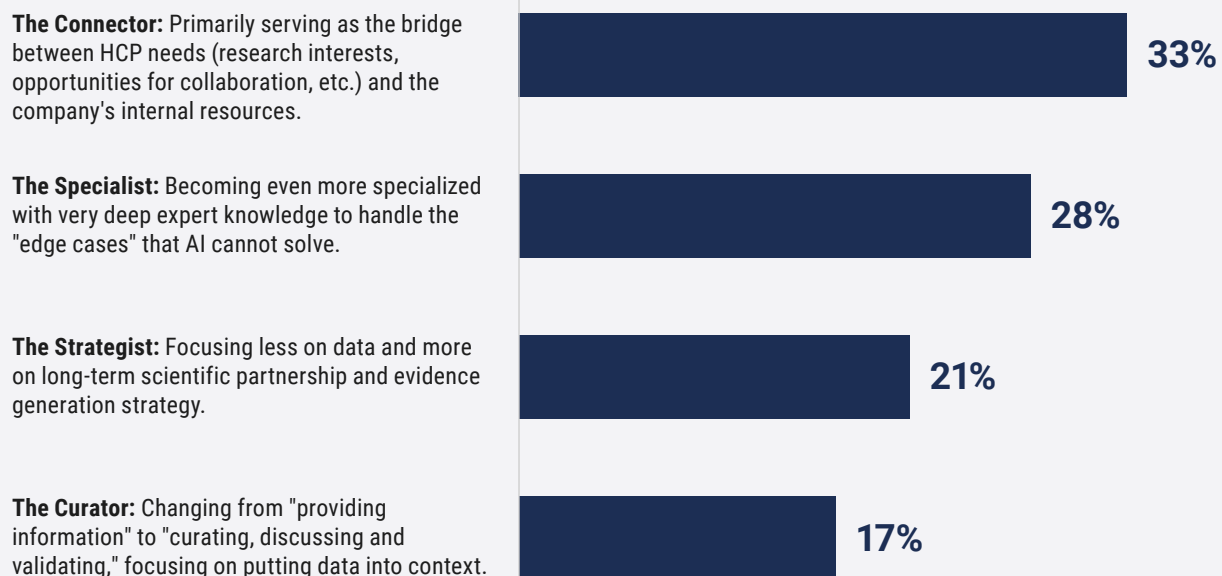


This data once again indicates a shift in the engagement dynamic, increasing importance on specialization and depth in KOL interactions with MSLs. Now is the time for medical affairs teams to evaluate their current way of working and identify the changes required to deliver value beyond the LLM.

The changing role of the MSL

As AI becomes more integrated into their workflow, KOLs indicated how they anticipate the MSL role will change over the next three to five years. Thirty-four percent predict MSLs will be connectors, primarily bridging KOL interests with collaborative opportunities within the company. Others (28%) see MSLs becoming even more specialized and serving as deep experts on the disease area and product. However, only a small subset (17%) anticipate MSLs evolving into curators with a focus on putting data into context. This is most likely because AI applications sufficiently cover this aspect.

How do you anticipate the role of MSLs changing over the next 3–5 years as AI applications become more integrated into your workflow?



While all of these roles are part of an MSL profile today, the data points to a common theme. There are certain actions that humans are better at performing. Trust, human connection, collaboration, and handling ambiguity are key examples where humans deliver value that AI cannot replicate.

Summary

The data is clear: AI won't replace the MSL, but it does raise the standard for providing value. Mere data dissemination is no longer enough. This new reality calls on medical affairs to rethink its engagement model to deliver what AI cannot: specialized expertise and deeper scientific collaboration.

Although HCPs and KOLs may turn to AI first to get information, they will continue to rely on MSLs as trusted, knowledgeable connections to the biopharma organization. To meet these changing expectations, MSLs must focus on human connection and delivering deep scientific insights with speed and precision.

By keeping scientific communication channels open to the stakeholders who have the highest influence on the delivery of care, MSLs will become even more critical to clinical practice optimization and company success. To fulfill this mission, now is the time for medical affairs teams to adapt to meet KOL expectations in the age of AI and beyond.

**Read our [whitepaper](#) to learn more
about the path forward in this AI era.**



Demographic Summary

Online survey of 75 KOLs (35 US, 40 EU) across 15 specialties who use AI daily to get scientific information concerning patient care. April 2026.

KOL status qualified by participating in at least three out of the following activities: publishing in scientific journals, involvement in clinical trials, speaking at conferences, and contributing to guidelines.

Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.



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