CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main conclusion that can be derived from this study is that Internet usage among Malaysia doctors is definitely on the high end and the conventional role of medical sales representative solely as a source of information provider is clearly under threat in the future. The section 5.2 Business Implications gives views on the evolving role of MSR.

In this chapter, the main conclusions that are made from the research objectives are outlined briefly. For an in depth discussion refer to the section 4.2 Analysis of Measures.

5. 1 Conclusions

The findings from the DOCTORS INTERNET SURVEY allow the following conclusions to be made pertaining to Internet usage among Malaysian doctors: -

Computer ownership among doctors in Malaysia is 90%. This clearly indicates a positive sign in terms of IT literacy among this professional group and they are at par with doctors in developing countries such as United Kingdom and USA.

Internet accessibility rate was 84% amongst doctors who were surveyed (included doctors who owned computers and those who did not) and a higher ratio of 94% in the group of doctors who already owned a computer. This clearly indicates that doctors in Malaysia are Internet savvy and far superior to their European and American counterparts.

There was no difference in Internet accessibility in doctors in public and private sector, between urban and rural areas and also in male and female doctors.

Younger doctors (aged 50 and below) were also more Internet savvy than those older doctors (aged 51 and above). This is consistent with most new technology tools as younger doctors are more receptive to new technology and idealogy.

The majority of doctors have had Internet access for more than two years. This shows that the importance of IT was well entrenched by governmental efforts.

One third of the doctors use the Internet 3 – 4 times a day and this is relatively a high usage of Internet as compared to an average Internet user.

Majority of doctors normally use the Internet at home.

The reason for not having Internet access was mainly because doctors did not find the need to have Internet access.

Malaysian doctors were more interested in obtaining medical related information when surfing the Net as compared to using for just e-mail purposes, in comparison with doctors worldwide. Surprisingly, Malaysian doctors were also less inclined to use the e-mail as compared to the average Malaysian Internet user.

When looking for medical related information online, Malaysian doctors had similar interest as doctors abroad, they looked mostly for disease information, next at medical journals and last at drug information.

For non-medical related information surfed by the doctors, finance/banking/share market was the first choice, followed by "other information" and politics came in

last. Here, the doctors were more skewed towards business interests than politics.

The most important information looked for at the pharmaceutical company website was product information.

The results also showed that Internet was becoming an important source of medical information for doctors as it was ranked third and was the favourite choice for a quarter of the doctors surveyed. This survey and the other local survey[10] conducted so far found that Internet was the preferred choice of health information provider than the MSR and pharmaceutical company brochure. In fact, both the surveys found that the MSR was the least preferred choice of medical information provider. Thus, the declining interest of doctors from obtaining medical information from MSR's could also attribute to the increasing level of interest in using Internet. There is no doubt that Internet has and will further gain popularity amongst doctors as an important channel of obtaining the latest medical related information.

5.2 Business Implications

The DOCTORS INTERNET SURVEY is conclusive in determining the Internet as a source of medical information for doctors in Malaysia. Conventionally, doctors gain medical information from medical seminars/symposiums/congress that are mainly sponsored by pharmaceutical companies but organised by the relevant medical bodies. In addition to this, doctors see MSR's who use pharmaceutical company brochures (promote individual company drugs and latest disease information) and lastly also from medical literature (medical journals, medical newsletters etc.)

Additional research can be considered on these three areas:

5.3.1 PATIENT E-MAIL AND DOCTOR-PATIENT COMMUNICATIONS

'Why Doctors Hate the Net' [8] - a study carried out by Forrester Research and reported in Wired News in April 2000, suggest that many doctors do not welcome patient e-mail and a large proportion surveyed said that in future they would not personally respond to patient e-mail and some said they would only do so if they were compensated. Many doctors surveyed also viewed consumer orientated websites negatively because they often caused the patients to make inappropriate demands. Another survey results from WebSurveyMD.com, run by Ziment [9] showed that less than half of the doctors surveyed believed that the Internet would improve doctor-patient communications.

This shows that another important area of research is to determine the views of the Malaysian doctors with regards to patient e-mail and doctor-patient communications. Although, at present Malaysian doctors were less inclined to use the Internet for e-mail, we can find out whether they are favourable towards patient e-mail or would only answer patient e-mail if they were compensated. This can further extend to finding out the local doctors views on the burgeoning of consumer orientated websites and the more health information empowered patient. Do the doctors find themselves in a quandary due to a better-informed patient or do the doctors view such consumer-orientated websites favourably as helping them to communicate the right messages to patients. It will also be interesting to know whether the Malaysian doctor feels that the Internet will further improve the doctor patient communications.

5.3.2 PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANY WEBSITES

Another scope for additional research is that currently most doctors do not like to access pharmaceutical company websites nor do they like to see the MSRs'. So for in depth product information, which will be the preferred choice of source for doctors. Here, we can find out what the doctors' expectations are at pharmaceutical companies' website and what the companies can do to create a more favourable online presence.

5.3.3 E-HEALTH TECHNOLOGIES

There is also no data present at the moment to assess the doctors acceptability to e-health technologies or platforms such as Medical Online available in Malaysia, a software designed specifically for general practitioners to manage their own clinics from inventory, patient recruiting, patient prescribing, patient billing, patient database, staffing and etc. It will interesting to know the rate of general practitioners who are keen to subscribe to such technologies currently and treat their patients.