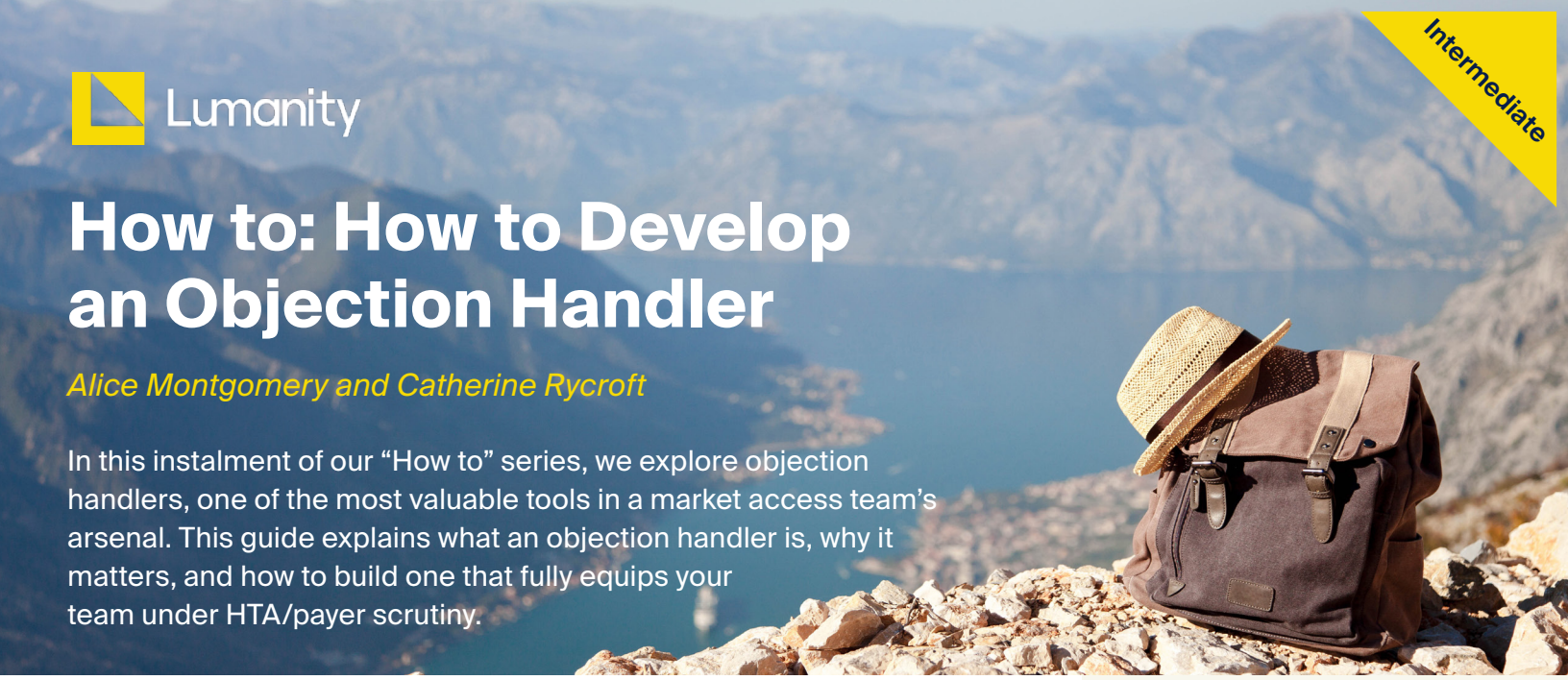
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Intermediate

How to: How to Develop an Objection Handler

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In this instalment of our "How to" series, we explore objection handlers, one of the most valuable tools in a market access team's arsenal. This guide explains what an objection handler is, why it matters, and how to build one that fully equips your team under HTA/payer scrutiny.

What is an objection handler?

An objection handler is a structured resource that equips local affiliates, medical scientific liaisons, and field teams with consistent, evidence-based responses to anticipated objections and challenges that may be raised by health technology assessment (HTA)/reimbursement agencies and payers. Formatted as a series of questions and responses, an objection handler provides teams with a reference grounded in approved data and aligned to the product's core value proposition. A well-designed objection handler is easily navigable and organized around the key topic areas of value. It is usually accompanied by a global value dossier (GVD), and tends to provide cross-links to the GVD for further detail where needed.

When should an objection handler be developed or updated?

An objection handler should be developed alongside a GVD, usually towards the end of GVD development to ensure you have a robust supportive evidence base.

Additionally, the objection handler should be updated:

- Following feedback from:
  - Regulatory bodies: preemptively capture responses to any concerns that arise during regulatory submissions
  - HTA and reimbursement submissions: learn from a previous HTA appraisal to prepare for the next
  - Clinical experts during advisory boards or validation meetings
- When a new competitor enters the market, or an existing competitor releases new positive data
- Whenever new key resources become available that could be used to strengthen your responses to objections (e.g., real-world evidence studies; new data cuts; outputs of a Delphi panel or structured expert elicitation)

Why are objection handlers important?

Consistency



The same objection may be raised across multiple markets. An objection handler ensures that every affiliate delivers the same approved, on-label message, regardless of country/region

Preparation



An objection handler means affiliates are prepared, with the correct, evidence-based responses to hand

Compliance



A well-constructed objection handler that has been thoroughly reviewed and approved keeps teams aligned with company messaging and the organization protected

How to develop an objection handler

1. Identify the objections to address

Objections may be identified from multiple sources including:

- During GVD development, and prior evidence review and generation activities
- Publicly available HTA conclusions for your product and relevant competitor products to understand the objections being raised by agencies in local markets
- Participants of any previous internal stakeholder workshops
- Local affiliates collating insights from patients, clinicians, and payer experts in local markets that may translate into likely objections
- Value-message-testing workshops/interviews, particularly around weaknesses and potential threats to the product's value proposition

Compile an initial list of objections and obtain approval from the wider team (including local affiliates) before formulating responses.

We recommend that the objection handler is structured around the following topic areas:

- **Disease background, burden, current treatment landscape, and unmet needs**
- **Characteristics of the product**, including mode of action, positioning, administration, and eligibility
- **Design and conduct of clinical studies**
- **Clinical value of the product**, including efficacy, safety, and impact on humanistic burden
- **Comparative value of the product:** comparative effectiveness outputs (e.g., indirect comparison)
- **Economic value of the product:** including cost-effectiveness and budget impact modeling

2. Develop responses from approved, evidence-based content

Once the final question list is agreed, formulate responses for each. Each response should provide a concise summary of the answer, supporting evidence, and cross-references to the GVD for further detail, as appropriate.

3. Align cross-functionally through review

Allow at least two rounds of review—initially with the immediate review team, and at least one wider review by the global team and local affiliates—before finalization.

4. Train and deploy effectively

Consider running a training workshop to guide your team through the objections and how to use the objection handler in practice.

5. Update regularly

Changes in the treatment landscape, new clinical data, guideline updates, label changes, and payer or HTA decisions may necessitate new, or updates to, objections/responses. Assign a clear owner, establish a regular review cadence, and review all updates before redeployment.

Key success factors for a robust objection handler

- Identify key objections from multiple sources, including HTA conclusions, affiliate insight, workshop feedback, and stakeholder testing
- Ensure each response is supported by approved, referenced evidence for credibility and a stronger position under scrutiny
- Establish cross-functional alignment early to reduce review friction and ensure agreement
- Assign a clear owner to review and update as needed in response to changes in the competitive landscape, evidence base, and market access environment

Have a question for our authors?



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