

Pfizer to network with 30,000 US doctors with Sermo deal

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Pfizer has signed an innovative deal with Sermo, the USA's largest online physician community, a move which means that the drugs giant may improve its efficiency when it comes to getting access to doctors.

Sermo, launched in September 2006, is a social-networking site for licensed physicians and it has 30,000 members (and growing by 2,000 doctors per week. On Sermo, physicians exchange knowledge with each other "and gain potentially life-saving insights directly from colleagues", the group says, "instead of waiting to read about them in conventional media sources".

The attraction of the deal to Pfizer is pretty clear as it will be in touch with this vital community in a way other than the traditional route of sales reps. The company said that the collaboration is designed "to redefine the way physicians in the US and the healthcare industry work together to improve patient care" and the doctors will have access to Pfizer's "clinical content in tangible ways that allow for the transparent and efficient exchange of knowledge".

Pfizer and Sermo said that the key objectives of the collaboration, include looking at "how best to transform the way medical information is exchanged in the fast-moving social media environment" and creating "an open and transparent discussion with physicians through the innovative channel offered by online exchange". They also intend to work with the US Food and Drug Administration to define guidelines for the use of social media in communications with healthcare professionals.

Pfizer and Sermo, which is funded by financial institutions who can access information on the site to get information on "emerging trends and market-changing events in healthcare" did not reveal the financial details of the collaboration. Whatever the cost, the New York-based drugs giant will think it is money well-spent if it goes some way to improving the relationship between big pharma and physicians, especially at a time when Pfizer is laying off some 2,200 people from its US salesforce.