



Last October, Conference & Logistics Consultants Inc. planned a three-day meeting in Salt Lake City that was cosponsored by a pharmaceutical company and a home health care organization. More than 2,000 people attended.

Like most meetings, several educational seminars were offered, but the big difference here was the objective: to solicit feedback from home health care professionals about challenges they faced on the job.

Attendees, who separated into small groups, were asked to discuss work-related issues and problems that either they or

their patients had experienced with the pharmaceutical company's drugs. What's more, four people were honored for their dedication to patient care after the terrorist attacks in September 2001.

This clearly wasn't your typical pharmaceutical meeting. Many meeting planners in this industry say most meetings are impersonal and focus on clinical results, scientific data and product promotions.

What gives?

"Pharmaceutical meetings are different," said Paul Henning, president of Conference & Logistics Consultants Inc. in Annapolis, Md. "Suddenly there's a turnaround in really being concerned about the individual."

Paying more attention to health care providers and patients is one of many examples that demonstrate how pharmaceutical meetings are evolving.

The trends driving many of these changes are influencing everything from meeting objectives and delivery formats to where events are being held.

Still, pharmaceutical meeting planners wouldn't trade places with anyone. For them, the industry still delivers more

rewards than challenges. But are the trends helping them produce higher-quality events? The answer may not be so clear.

Mergers and Acquisitions

Since the 1980s, the pharmaceutical industry has experienced roughly 35 major mergers, says Jeff Trewhitt, spokesperson for the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) in Washington, D.C. By pooling resources, pharmaceuticals can compete globally and allocate sufficient funds toward research and development. Trewhitt says more companies are developing drugs through biotechnology instead of traditional chemistry, which has caused research and development costs to soar from \$2 billion collectively for PhRMA members in 1980 to \$32.1 billion in 2002.

The increased expenses have led to budget cuts in many areas, such as professional meetings, where the impact has been substantial.

"During the past several years, pharmaceuticals have been sending fewer people to meetings," said Sharon Pichon,

ShortCut

Mergers and acquisitions, e-vites and marketing to consumers. The list of changes in the pharmaceutical industry during recent years goes on and on. As the industry continues to reshape itself, meeting planners are changing the way they do their jobs. The days of wooing physicians with expensive gifts or weekends at five-star resorts are long gone. Now's the time for smaller, focused meetings and more educational content. Who says change has to be bad?

