Been there, done it, got the T-shirt. Life in Med Comms

Rick Flemming PhD, CMPP
What does a medical writer in Med Comms typically do?

- Helps pharmaceutical* companies to communicate about their drugs to healthcare professionals**

- Writes high-quality, scientific copy
  – in many different therapy areas
  – in many different formats

*Also biotech, diagnostics and device companies
**And other audiences!
Overview of some medical communication services

- **Publications**
- **Educational materials**, such as slide kits and monographs
- **Live educational, scientific meetings of all sizes**
- **E-solutions**, such as websites, and digital strategies
- **Strategic consulting and competitor intelligence**
Publications

- Abstracts for congresses
- Posters/slide presentations for congresses
- Clinical study manuscripts
- Review articles
- Meta-analyses
Clinical study manuscript

Tolerability and safety of perampanel: two randomized dose-escalation studies


Objectives – To evaluate, for the first time in patients with epilepsy, the tolerability and safety of escalating doses of oral perampanel, a novel, selective, non-competitive AMPA antagonist, as adjunctive therapy for refractory partial-onset seizures. Materials and methods – Two consecutive, randomized, double-blind, dose-escalation studies recruited adults (18–70 years) with uncontrolled partial-onset seizures receiving one to three concomitant antiepileptic drugs. In study 206,

Acknowledgements

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Clinical study manuscript: how it works in practice

Teleconference with client (pharma) and authors (clinical study investigators)

Receive brief for an experienced colleague

Write first draft based on review comments on outline

Address internal review comments and send to client and authors

Write a bulleted outline
Factor Xa Inhibitors: Next-Generation Antithrombotic Agents

Donald J. P. Pinto, Joanne M. Smallheer, Daniel L. Cheney, Robert M. Knabb, and Ruth R. Wexler*

Research and Development, Bristol-Myers Squibb Company, P.O. Box 5400, Princeton, New Jersey, 08543

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Review article

EGFR mutation testing in lung cancer: a review of available methods and their use for analysis of tumour tissue and cytology samples

Gillian Ellison,1 Guanshan Zhu,2 Alexandros Moullis,3 Simon Dearden,1 Georgina Speake,1 Rose McCormack1

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Meetings

- Satellite symposia
- ‘Standalone’ meetings
- Advisory board meetings
- Pitches
- Medical/scientific association congresses
Medical congresses

• ASCO, Chicago
  – American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Annual Meeting
  – >25,000 registered delegates + ca. 10,000 affiliated professionals
  – Cutting-edge science
  – Asked to produce a report for a biosimilar manufacturer
How did I get into medical writing? (and what can you learn from my experience?)
Before MedComms

• BSc in Physiological Sciences, Newcastle University (’93–96)
• MSc in Human and Applied Physiology, King’s College, London (’96–97)
• Editorial Assistant, Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, London (’97–98)
Before MedComms

- PhD Physiology & Pharmacology, Leeds (’98–2002)

**Discrete store-operated calcium influx into an intracellular compartment in rabbit arteriolar smooth muscle**

R. Flemming, A. Cheong, A. M. Dedman and D. J. Beech

*School of Biomedical Sciences, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK*

This study tested the hypothesis that store-operated channels (SOCs) exist as a discrete population of Ca$^{2+}$ channels activated by depletion of intracellular Ca$^{2+}$ stores in cerebral arteriolar smooth muscle cells and explored their direct contractile function. Using the Ca$^{2+}$ indicator fura-PE3 it was
Leaving academia

- Narrow career path
- Short-term contracts
- Time for a change
- Knew my limitations
Why did I become a medical writer?

- Wanted to stay in science
- Clear career pathway
- Good mentorship and training
- Good financial benefits
- Variety of projects and therapy areas
- Work in different parts of the UK / world

... and fundamentally, I enjoy and am good at writing...
What did I learn in academia that is relevant to medical writing?

- Research skills and not get side tracked by needless detail
- Attention to detail and scientific accuracy
- Confidence in learning new skills and facts
- Ability to contribute to a team
Challenges of moving into Med Comms: culture shock

- Friday.....
- Monday.....
Challenges: deadlines
Challenges: criticism

√ 10
Could do better
Challenges: writing treadmill
Upsides: variety

• Epilepsy
• Oncology
• Spinal devices
• Thrombosis
• Men’s health
• Plus lots, lots more...
Upsides: flexibility (sometimes...)
Upsides: teamwork
Upsides: travel

- New York
- Chicago
- San Francisco
- Stockholm
- Prague
- Paris
- Florence
- Munich
Upsides: working with the experts
Upsides: demand for your services
Opportunities: clearly defined progression

- Associate Medical Writer
- Medical Writer
- Senior Medical Writer
- Editorial Manager or Principal Writer
- Editorial Unit Manager or Editorial Director
Increasing opportunities with greater experience

**Associate Medical Writer**
- Learn the job
- High proportion of job spent writing at desk

**Medical Writer**
- Build up experience
- Increase client contact & live meeting experience

**Senior Medical Writer**
- Pass on experience and review the work of others
- Lead client teams and meetings without support

**Editorial Manager**
- Line management and business development
- Provide clients with strategic advice
My career in MedComms

2003
• Medical Writer, MedComms Agency, Macclesfield

2005
• Senior Medical Writer, MedComms Agency, Knutsford
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2006
• Editorial Manager, MedComms Agency, Knutsford
My career in MedComms

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2005
• Senior Medical Writer, MedComms Agency, Knutsford

2006
• Editorial Manager, MedComms Agency, Knutsford

2008
• Freelance Medical Writer
Benefits of being a freelance medical writer

- You are your own boss
- Flexibility in when you work and what work you do
- Potential to earn more
Drawbacks of being a freelance medical writer

- Losing the benefits of being in employment (regular wage, holiday and sick pay, pension etc.)
- Risk of not getting enough work to pay your bills
- Marketing yourself
- Book-keeping and accountancy
- Possibly lose the social element of working with and around other people
Don’t think about becoming a freelancer too soon!!

• I had several years of medical communications experience before I started working for myself

• This meant
  – I had a wide range of experience of working on different projects and therapy areas
  – I had considerable experience in providing strategic guidance and finding solutions to particular problems

• Most importantly – the longer you have stayed within agencies, the more people you know
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2008
• Freelance Medical Writer
My career in MedComms

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2006
• Editorial Manager, MedComms Agency, Knutsford

2008
• Freelance Medical Writer

2011
• Freelance Medical Writing Agency
“Life is like riding a bicycle, in order to keep your balance, you must keep moving.” Albert Einstein (1879–1955)
What can you learn from the pathway I took into medical writing?

- Your PhD and/or post-doc are valued!

- But you have to be prepared to start again ‘at the bottom’ and prove your worth in a new, unfamiliar environment

- Before applying for jobs, try to ensure you can demonstrate the following skills
  - Writing experience
  - Research skills
  - Scientific accuracy
  - Ability to work in a team
  - Knowledge of industry codes and guidelines
Is medical writing for you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enjoy and excel at writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scientific background and love of science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedantic and accurate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good communication skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent research skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t mind or love travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to think on feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thick skinned!!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tips for getting into Med Comms

• Write at every opportunity
• Learn about medical writing, Med Comms and pharma
• **Perfect** your CV, covering letter and emails!!!
  – Highlight any therapeutically relevant knowledge/experience (e.g. oncology, cardiovascular medicine, neurology)
• Try and get relevant work experience
  – Contact freelance medical writers, Med Comms companies
  – Although not advertised, some may offer paid or unpaid experience
• Contact relevant recruitment companies
  – They will do the hard work by sending your CV to relevant companies
  – They may also help you prepare for interviews
  – Try to identify those who truly understand Med Comms
What’s next for me?

• The truth is I can’t imagine being in a different role

• Each day I am writing or communicating about something different, and in doing so I am learning about something new
Feel free to contact me

rick.flemming@aspire-scientific.com

Search for Rick Flemming

@aspiresci (Ryan Woodrow)