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# A Career in Medical Communications

Chris Winchester and Catherine Henderson  
1 July 2008

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# Agenda

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- Introductions
- Medical communications and the pharmaceutical industry
- The role of the medical writer
- Application process and career progression
- Discussion

# A route in: Chris

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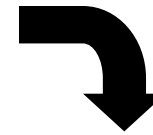
*Medical communications*



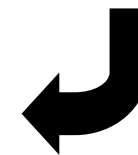
*BA and DPhil in Biochemistry*



*Management consultant*



*Overland expedition*



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# A route in: Catherine

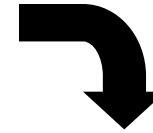
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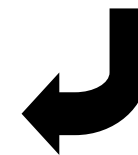
**Medical communications**



**DPhil in Plant Sciences**



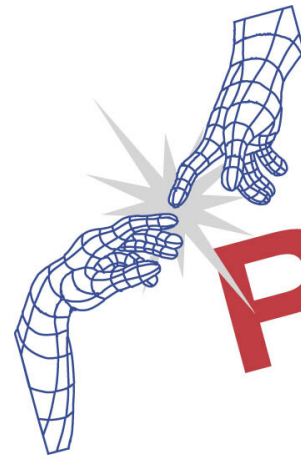
**Careers Service  
Contacts Database**



**Met Chris for chat  
Test and interview**



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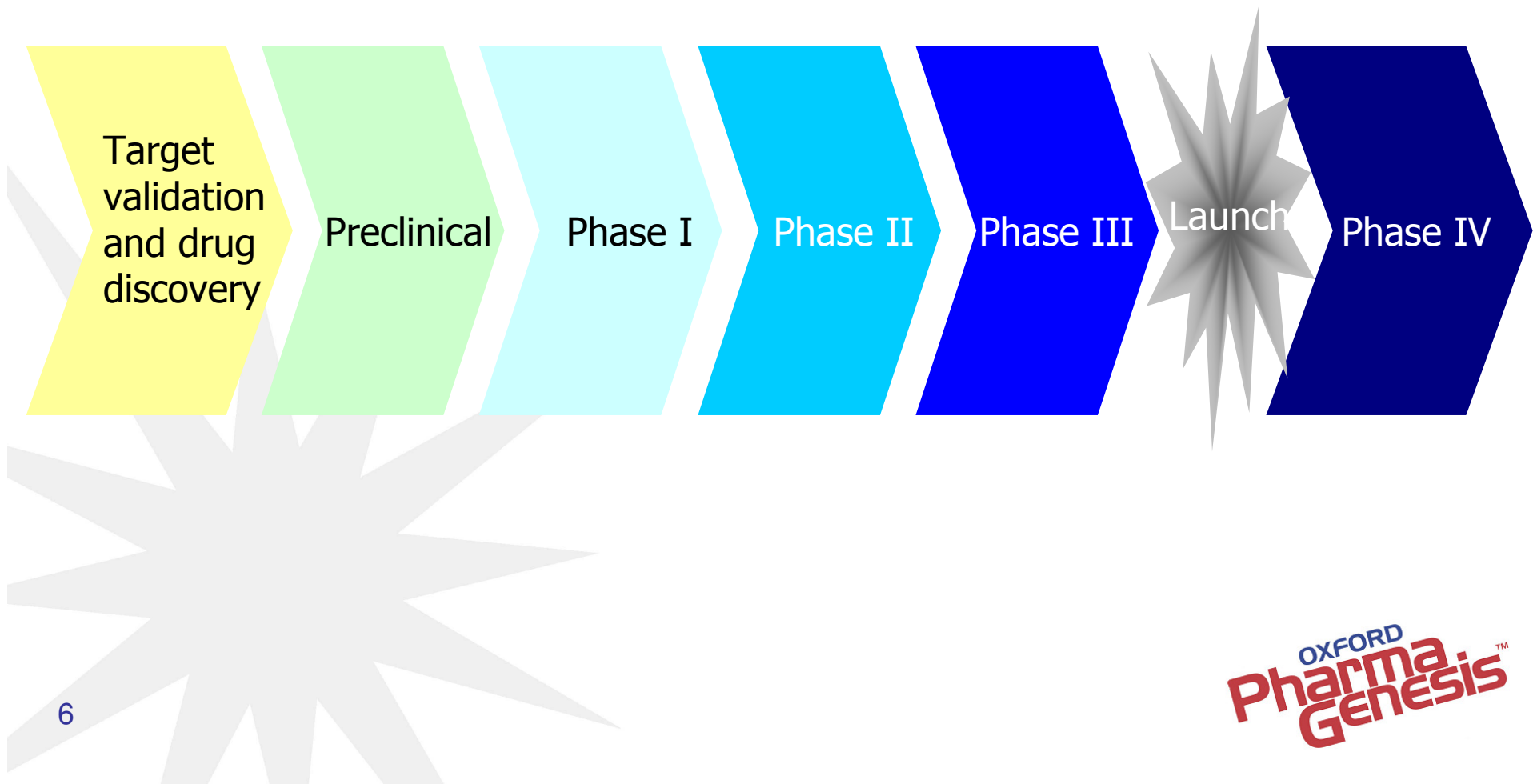
# Medical communications and the pharmaceutical industry



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# Drug development: from bench to bedside

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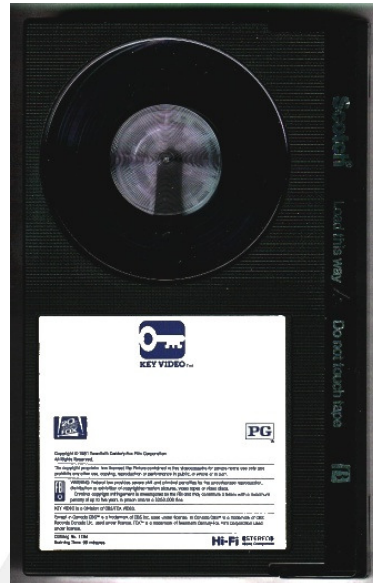
# A good product alone is not enough

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- It costs > \$1 billion to bring a drug to market
- For every ground-breaking drug that succeeds, there is another that fails
- Increasing pressures on the industry make effective pharmaceutical marketing ever more important

# Betamax vs VHS

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**Betamax**  
High definition  
Innovative  
Lost



**VHS**  
Lower definition  
Copycat technology  
Won

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# Apple vs Microsoft

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## **Apple Macintosh**

Innovative  
Reliable  
Lost



## Windows

## **Microsoft Windows**

Copycat technology  
Crashed a lot  
Won

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# Selected disasters of pharmaceutical marketing

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Exubera (inhaled insulin)  
2006–2007

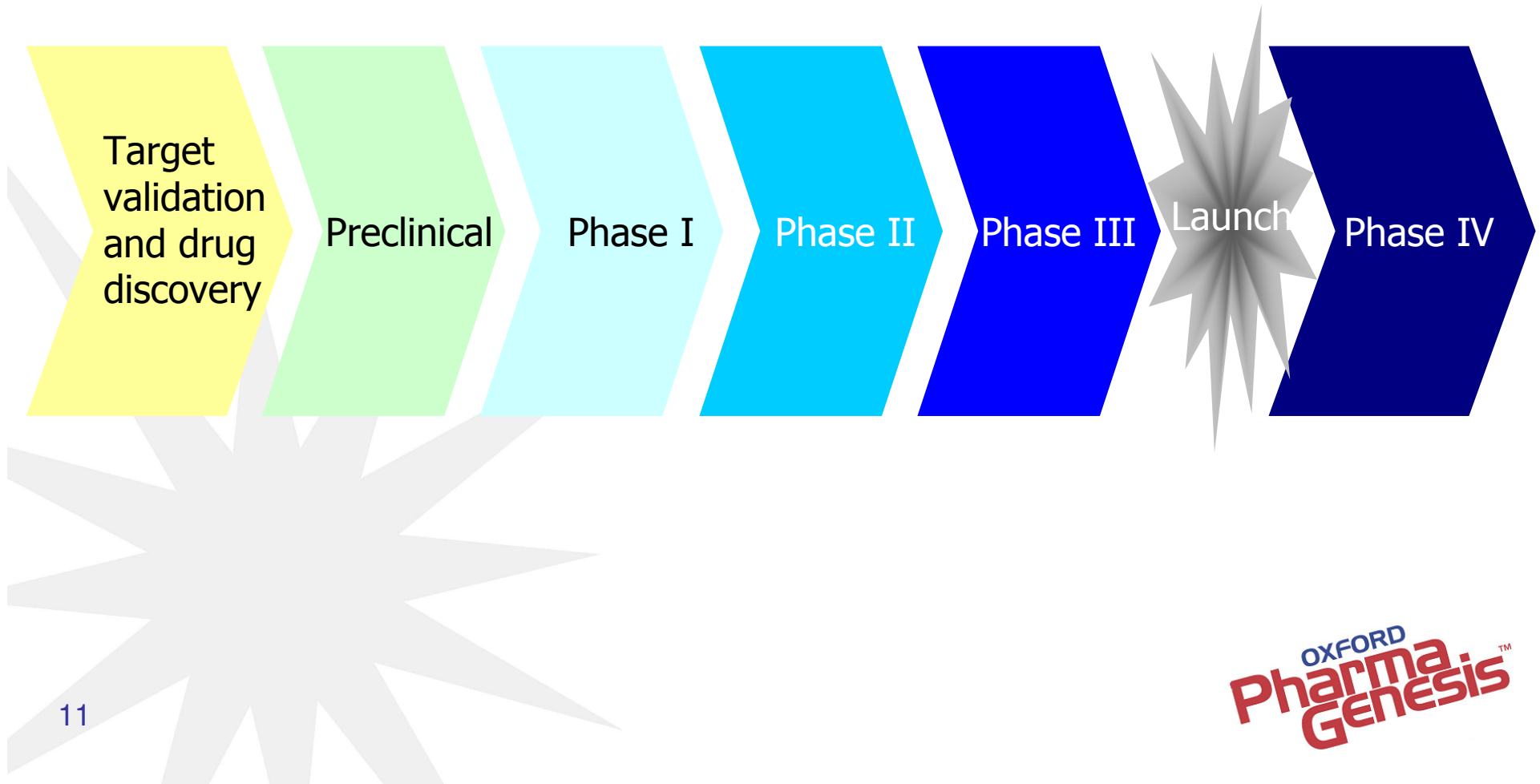


Eminase (anistreplase)  
1985–1995

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# Marketing: not just a post-launch activity

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# What sorts of things do agencies do?

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Educational materials  
for doctors and patients

Help doctors to write  
peer-review publications

Branding and positioning

Medical  
communications  
agencies

Materials for congresses

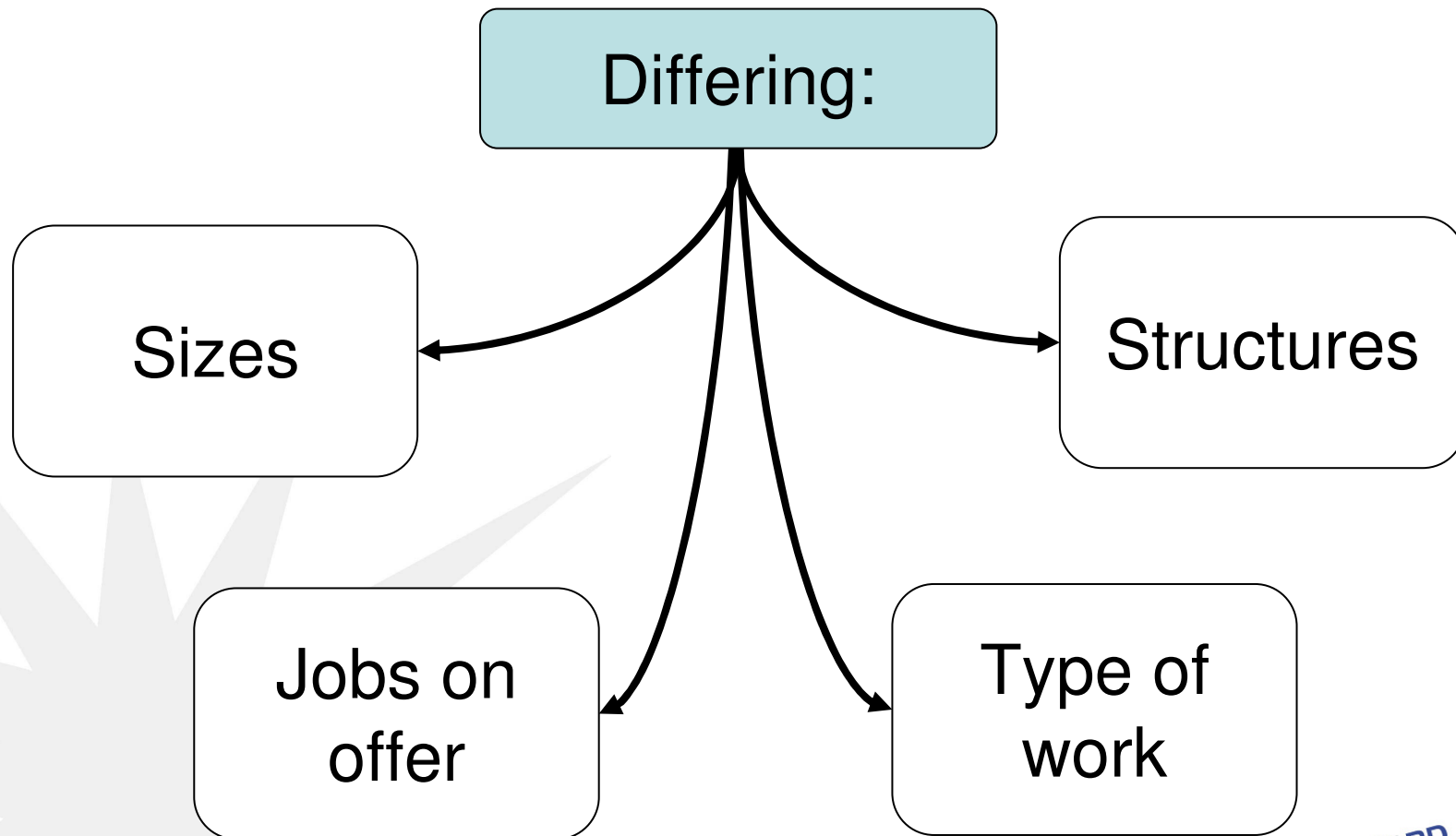
Regulatory materials

Event organization

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# Are all agencies the same?

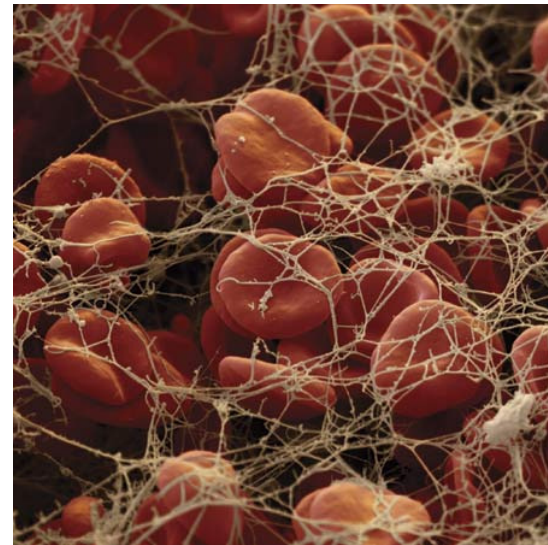
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# Case study: anticoagulant

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- Client situation
  - Global client about to launch a new anticoagulant
  - Massive unmet need in a therapy area littered with failures
  - Single most important product to secure the company's future
- Agency response
  - Gauge opinion and develop relationships
    - Expert meetings
  - Communicate key data and generate citable material
    - Peer-reviewed publications
  - Educate prescribers
    - Unmet needs
    - Drug benefits
  - Build internal skills and commitment
    - Internal newsletter, website and launch meeting

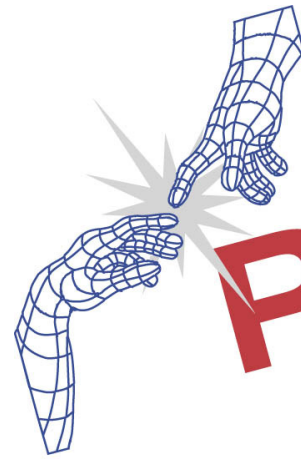


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# What role could I have in an agency?

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- Medical writer
- Medical editor
- Account manager
- Event organizer
- Business development



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# The role of the medical writer



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# A day in the life of a medical writer

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- Reading scientific papers
- Internet research
- Writing text (Word or PowerPoint)
- Editing and proof-reading
- Meeting colleagues to discuss timelines, costs and resources
- Phone calls with client, designer or author
- Reading and sending e-mails

# Different models have different benefits

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## Departmental model

- Account manager takes the lead with client and project management
- Writer focuses on writing
- Sales people are responsible for business development

## Team model

- Writer manages own project from proposal to invoicing:
  - writing
  - client/author liaison
  - design
  - approval
  - business development

# What it is really like – advantages

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- Being at the forefront of medical science
- Applying scientific understanding in a commercial environment
- Working with the leading experts in their field
- Having opportunities for travel
- Working for a small company outside London



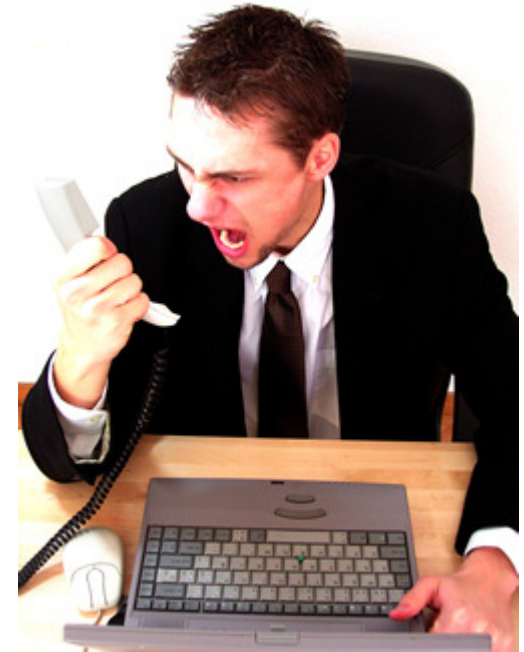
*Meeting experts in  
the therapy area*

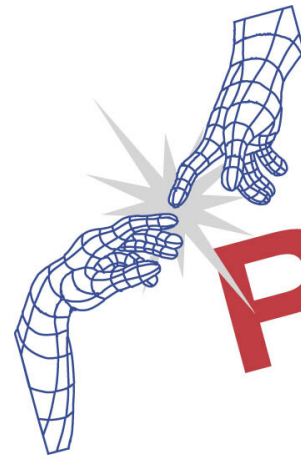
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# What it is really like – disadvantages

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- Demanding clients
- Egotistical 'opinion leaders'
- Tight deadlines
- Commercial slant – 'spin'
- Timesheets and invoices





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Application process and career  
progression

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# What an agency is looking for

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- Able to write clear and concise English
- Interested in application of science
- Structured thinker
- Intelligent and flexible
- Personable and polite



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# Getting in

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Speculative applications

- Network Pharma
- [www.pmlive.com](http://www.pmlive.com)
- [www.inpharm.com](http://www.inpharm.com)

Respond to job adverts

- New Scientist
- Guardian on Mondays
- [www.emwa.org](http://www.emwa.org)

Use the university contacts database

Writing test

Interview 1

Interview 2

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# What would the ideal test look like?

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- Attention to detail (spotting and avoiding data inconsistencies and misspelled words)
- Well-structured text and unambiguous sentences
- An appropriate and readable writing style (including flexibility to write manuscripts, newsletters, slides and marketing materials)
- Appropriate background research, including an ability to bring out the key points from both clinical and commercial perspectives
- Ability to follow a brief (word count, structure and target audience)
- Evidence of enthusiasm and creative flair



# Questions to ask at interview

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- Will I have direct client and author contact?
- Will I have control over my own projects?
- How varied will the writing be?
- Will I get the opportunity to work in different therapy areas?
- Can I specialize if I wish?
- Is there the opportunity to travel?
- Is there a bonus scheme?

# Opportunities for career progression

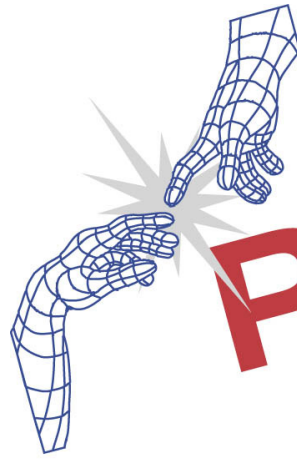
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- Staying put
  - Changing job title
  - More responsibility
  - Greater independence
  - More money
  - Contribute more to strategic projects
  - Management involvement
  - Training new writers
- Moving on
  - Other agencies
  - Industry positions
  - Freelance

# Why medical communications?

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- It offers the chance to:
  - use your scientific training
  - learn about science as applied to medicine
  - see how the commercial world works
  - work with like-minded colleagues
  - have a stable and rewarding career



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Thank you!

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