A Career in Medical Communications

Chris Winchester and Catherine Henderson
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Agenda

- Introductions
- Medical communications and the pharmaceutical industry
- The role of the medical writer
- Application process and career progression
- Discussion
A route in: Chris

BA and DPhil in Biochemistry

Medical communications

Management consultant

Overland expedition
A route in: Catherine

Medical communications

DPhil in Plant Sciences

Met Chris for chat
Test and interview

Careers Service
Contacts Database
Medical communications and the pharmaceutical industry
Drug development: from bench to bedside
A good product alone is not enough

- 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

**Betamax**
- High definition
- Innovative
- Lost

**VHS**
- Lower definition
- Copycat technology
- Won
Apple vs Microsoft

Apple Macintosh
Innovative
Reliable
Lost

Microsoft Windows
Copycat technology
Crashed a lot
Won
Selected disasters of pharmaceutical marketing

Exubera (inhaled insulin)
2006–2007

Eminase (anistreplase)
1985–1995
Marketing: not just a post-launch activity

- Target validation and drug discovery
- Preclinical
- Phase I
- Phase II
- Phase III
- Launch
- Phase IV
What sorts of things do agencies do?

- Educational materials for doctors and patients
- Help doctors to write peer-review publications
- Materials for congresses
- Branding and positioning
- Regulatory materials
- Event organization

Medical communications agencies
Are all agencies the same?

Differing:

- Sizes
- Structures
- Jobs on offer
- Type of work
Case study: anticoagulant

- **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
What role could I have in an agency?

- Medical writer
- Medical editor
- Account manager
- Event organizer
- Business development
The role of the medical writer
A day in the life of a medical writer

- 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

**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

• 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
What it is really like – disadvantages

- Demanding clients
- Egotistical ‘opinion leaders’
- Tight deadlines
- Commercial slant – 'spin'
- Timesheets and invoices
Application process and career progression
What an agency is looking for

• Able to write clear and concise English

• Interested in application of science

• Structured thinker

• Intelligent and flexible

• Personable and polite
Getting in

Speculative applications
• Network Pharma
  • www.pmlive.com
  • www.inpharm.com

Respond to job adverts
• New Scientist
• Guardian on Mondays
  • www.emwa.org

Use the university contacts database

Writing test

Interview 1

Interview 2
What would the ideal test look like?

- 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

- 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

- **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?

• 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
Thank you!