Been there, done it, got the T-shirt. The life of a medical writer

Ryan Woodrow
What does a medical writer do?

- Helps pharmaceutical companies to communicate about their drugs to healthcare professionals
- Writes high-quality, scientific copy in **ALL** areas that med comms companies work in
Overview of medical communication services

- Manuscripts, posters and presentations
- Educational materials, such as slide kits and monographs
- Live educational, scientific meetings of all sizes
- Strategic consulting and competitor intelligence
- E-solutions, such as websites and digital strategies
BUT... there is so much more

- NO two days are ever the same
- As you become more experienced, you will be given greater opportunities
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 Team Leader**
- Line management and business development
- Provide clients with strategic advice
Why did I become a medical writer for a medical communications company?

• Variety of projects
• Variety of therapy areas
• Clear career pathway
• Good mentorship and training
• Good financial benefits
• Like-minded people
• Work in different parts of the UK / world
• … and fundamentally, I enjoy writing
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is medical writing for you?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Enjoy writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific background and love of science</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pedantic and accurate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good communications skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Excellent research skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don’t mind or love travel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thick skinned!!</td>
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Some quotes from other medical writers

Medical writing satisfies my lust for science but also uses my creativity.

I found the agency environment fulfilling, as it provided me with opportunities to work across a broad range of therapeutic areas.

I would recommend a career in medical writing to anyone who wants to combine their passion for learning about new science and medicine with their enjoyment of writing.
How did I get into medical writing? (and what can you learn from my experience)
Qualifications

• I did a BSc (Hon) in Biological Sciences
• **BUT** most medical writers have a MSc or PhD
• Most, but not all medical writers have a life sciences degree
  – I know of medical writers with Chemistry and English degrees
Work experience

• I worked at AstraZeneca in their communication dept. during Summer holidays while I was at University

Benefits of gaining work experience

– Shows you are self-motivated
– Demonstrates your interest in medical writing / communications
– Enables you to provide references
– Helps you to get on your feet faster when you begin medical writing
Some other examples of relevant experience

1. **WRITE REGULARLY**, preferably on a relevant topic
   - Doctoral thesis, publications and grant applications
   - Otherwise: blogs, newspapers, university newsletters, etc

2. **Demonstrate PRESENTATION SKILLS**
   - Lecturing and giving presentations at conferences
   - Otherwise: journal clubs, dept talks and other Uni clubs

3. **ATTEND RELEVANT COURSES** in medical writing or related to pharmaceutical communications
   - Continue to attend relevant free events
My first jobs were not directly in medical writing…

…but were very relevant

- I worked in medical information

- Provided information to internal teams and healthcare professionals on a number of drugs in written and oral format
What did I learn from medical information?

<table>
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<th>Research skills</th>
<th>• Ability to drill down to key info without getting side-tracked by needless detail</th>
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<tr>
<td>Filter key information fast</td>
<td>• Picking-up on a new drug or therapy area within days or weeks is often needed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attention to detail and scientific accuracy</td>
<td>• Ensuring scientific accuracy is one of the most critical requirements for med writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guidelines and codes</td>
<td>• Need to become familiar with many different codes and guidelines</td>
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Ten years ago, I felt it was time for a new adventure.

I looked for a career offering plenty of variety, but which gave me the opportunity to do more of the thing that I enjoyed doing most: medical writing.
What can you learn from the pathway I took into medical writing?

- Having **a PhD in life sciences is very helpful**, but not essential
- **Gaining relevant experience** will help you get your first job in medical writing
- Before applying for jobs, try to ensure you can **demonstrate the following skills**
  - Writing experience
  - Research skills
  - Scientific accuracy
  - Knowledge of industry codes and guidelines
My pathway through med comms before becoming freelance

- Medical writer 2000
- Senior Medical Writer 2003
- Senior Technical Manager 2004
- Editorial Team Leader 2005
- VP Medical & Scientific Services 2007
Don’t think about becoming a freelancer too soon!!

• I had over 10 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
Quick tips for your job application process
Contact relevant recruitment companies

- As well as contacting med comms companies, contact recruitment agencies
- They will do the hard work by sending your CV to relevant companies
- They may also help you prepare for interviews
Social network

- Join LinkedIn, connect with people in med comms and participate in relevant groups
- Follow the conversation, companies and experts on Twitter (#medcomms and #pubplan)
Research the job!!

• Make sure you know
  – About the pharmaceutical and med comms industries
  – About regulations and guidelines
  – About what a medical writer actually does
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

Who needs more than that?
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