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

Ryan Woodrow
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 types of format

*Also biotech, diagnostics and device companies
Overview of some medical communication services

- Manuscripts, posters and presentations
- 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
Overview of some medical communication services

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BUT... there is so much more...
**No two days are the same**

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Opportunities: typical pathway in med comms for a medical writer
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 and 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
Is medical writing for you?

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<td>Scientific background and love of science</td>
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<td>Pedantic and accurate</td>
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<td>Good communication skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Excellent research skills</td>
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<td>Don’t mind or love travel</td>
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<td>Ability to think on feet</td>
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**Thick skinned!!**
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
  – And an advanced degree is now almost a requisite

• Most, but not all medical writers have a life sciences degree
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
- Enables you to provide references
- Helps you to get on your feet faster when you begin medical writing
Tips to gaining relevant work experience

• Contact freelance medical writers, med comms companies

• Although not advertised, some may offer paid or unpaid experience

• I can offer paid (£25/hr) experience for suitable individuals
  – Contact me at ryan.woodrow@aspire-scientific.com
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 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
Other non-med comms entry positions to consider

- Regulatory Affairs Associate
- Medical Science Liaison
- Clinical Research Associate
- Journal editor / sub editor
What did I learn from medical information that is relevant to medical writing?

Research skills and not get side tracked by needless detail

Attention to detail and scientific accuracy

Ability to contribute to a team

Guidelines and codes
Twelve 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?

• **Gaining relevant experience** will help you get your first job in medical writing

• Your first job may not be in med comms

• 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
How about freelance medical writing?
Benefits of being a freelance medical writer

- You are your own boss
- Flexibility of when you work
- 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
- Lose the social element of working with and around other people
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

• They will do the hard work by sending your CV to relevant companies (and they are FREE for you to use!!)

• They may also help you prepare for interviews
Social network

• Join LinkedIn, connect with people in med comms and participate in groups

• Follow the conversation, companies and experts on Twitter (e.g. #medcomms)

• **BUT** think carefully about the way you are perceived
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?
Feel free to contact me

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ryan.woodrow@aspire-scientific.com

Search for Ryan Woodrow