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

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 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
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
Is medical writing for you?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Enjoy writing</th>
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<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>Ability to think on feet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thick skinned!!</td>
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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
Tips to gaining relevant work experience

• Contact freelance medical writers and med comms consultants
• Some may offer paid experience
• We are currently looking for suitable individuals with experience in vaccines, infectious disease, neurology, oncology or nephrology
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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<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
- Senior Medical Writer
- Senior Technical Manager
- Editorial Team Leader
- VP Medical & Scientific Services
Benefits of being freelance

- You are your own boss
- Flexibility of when you work and what work you do
- Potential to earn more
Drawbacks of freelancing

• 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

• As well as contacting med comms companies, contact recruitment agencies

• 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 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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Search for Ryan Woodrow