



MEDICAL WRITING

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NetworkPharma Careers Insight Workshop

23 May 2011



My take on “Medical writing”

- Writing about drug treatments and therapeutic innovations
- Conveying messages telling “stories”
- Distilling and interpreting data and evidence
- Researching and enquiring
- Instructing and informing through words
- Working with experts – providing a Writing Service
- Audiences – Predominantly Clinicians & Marketers, occasionally Patients & Public



How I got started

- First degree in Pharmacology (Glasgow University)
- PhD in Pharmacology (Queens' College University of Cambridge)
- “Enjoyed” writing my thesis but knew research wasn't my calling
- Wanted a job marrying scientific understanding with communication, marketing and language
- Wanted variety within my job focus
- Interested in staying in realm of drugs and therapeutics



My career path

- First job – Medical writer with small agency outside Cambridge (1 year)
- Next step – Medical writer in special projects team of publisher of trade newspapers and journals (Doctor, Hospital Doctor) (2 years)
- Taking a chance – My boss and a business partner ask me to be their first member of staff in a new venture in Medical Communications....the Colwood Years begin...



My career path

- Colwood House
 - Company grows from two partners, me and a secretary to a 50-strong agency
 - Business: Servicing the pharmaceutical industry
 - My job evolves: New business work, complex and challenging therapies and therapeutic areas
 - I work part-time through the birth of two children
 - Bosses announce after 13 years that they are selling to a US agency....



My career path

- Colwood is sold
 - The process is slow and disruptive
 - New boss is nice...but...an old client gets in touch...would I like a job at her company?
 - 2 years at a new agency - I find my skills are transferable
- Scratching an itch....
 - In 2002 I decide to risk going freelance
 - 8 years on....I have a set of clients who know me and my work...and I enjoy being my own boss



Day to day work

- A job involving infinite variety
- Combines “scholarly” aspects with “selling and persuasion”
- Get to work with thought-leaders and innovators
- Keep abreast of medical innovation and healthcare policies and politics
- Huge variety of topics – drugs and diseases
- Creative & productive
- Deadline-based



Career options for Medical writers

- A core skill in Medical Communication agencies
- Springboard and platform for progression
 - Account management
 - People and team management
 - Freelance working (own boss)
 - Establish own agency



Traits & Key skills

- Written articulacy
- Analytical, enquiring & scholarly
- Accurate & thorough
- Able to assimilate briefs and data
- Able to work to deadlines
- Willing to write as a service for others (rather than for personal kudos)



Snapshot of typical work

- Technical writing
 - Original manuscripts, reviews, feature articles, posters, abstracts, product monographs, disease management books, technology appraisal submissions
- Journalistic writing
 - Congress and meeting reports, news story writing, meetings highlights, advisory board minutes
- Educational work
 - Slide-lecture sets, programme development, training materials, e-learning
- Marketing
 - Internal communications, marketing workshops, training materials
- Patient
 - Patient booklets, web copy



Case example: Congress Reporting

- **The Medical Writer's Brief**
 - Invited/commissioned by email September 2010
 - Attend congress in 2010 in Valencia
 - Produce a Highlights Report within 2 days of meeting
 - Focus of Report - A competitor review
 - Client interested in news and reports of treatments and interventions that compete with / are alternatives to their drug therapy
 - Will the client's drug be mentioned and if so - how will it be portrayed?
 - Format of Report - slides summarizing each day of the congress
- **The Process - Beforehand**
 - Teleconference with client to agree key sessions to attend
 - Client arranges travel, accommodation, congress registration (Press)
 - Client requests audio-recordings & photographs
 - Client sets up vista site for uploading daily copy and audio recordings
 - Research - Read around the subject!

Case example: Congress Reporting

- The Process – On-site
 - Get to Valencia!
 - Saturday:
 - Register at congress and meet with client
 - Client supplies camera – it doesn't work!
 - Attend 2 hour session – notes and audio
 - Copy selected posters – congress has copies that can be emailed to client
 - Write up Saturday copy
 - Sunday
 - Scheduled to attend 1 hour session at 4pm...maybe some sightseeing?
 - Client rings at 8am – wants me to cross town to a hotel where they are having an advisory board meeting – they want to borrow my audio recorder – theirs doesn't work!
 - Finally attend session and start to write it up
 - Client rings – they think they may have overlooked a key session today – can I cover it?
 - Dash back to congress centre – presentation has already been given as a late breaker – plan B needed
 - Monday
 - 3 sessions to attend and write up and Sunday sessions to write and file
 - Track down presenter of late-breaker from Sunday and ask for a short interview – enough information collected to write up a short summary – client will be pleased
 - Hotel internet connection too slow for uploading audio files – but slide copy filed
 - Tuesday
 - Two sessions to attend starting 7.45am
 - Travel home, writing final sessions on plane and uploading once “home”