

POST-ACADEMIC CAREERS CASE STUDIES

SCIENCE COMMS

MEDICAL WRITER

I also enjoy working with and seeing new clinical trial data, applying my scientific knowledge, and working closely with the pharmaceutical client team and external authors to prepare accurate scientific materials to inform and educate the scientific community. I find it immensely rewarding to work towards narrowing the communication gap between the rapidly evolving medical/science field and the healthcare professionals, the public and ultimately the patients.

What top 3 qualities are required for your job?

- 1 Team work
- 2 Adaptability, curiosity, and eagerness to learn
- 3 Attention to detail

Ana's Advice

My advice would be to start your research early, keep an open mind while being patient with yourself and to trust the process; talk to friends, colleagues, mentors, network, network, network! Take advantage of the career service at your university and talk to the career advisors. Join courses on how to write a cover letter, a CV and essentially how to talk about your many transferable skills! Do not underestimate the transferable skills you have gained from your years in academia. The ability to break down complex concepts

and to explain them to a diverse audience, presentation skills, the ability to research, assimilate and understand complex information, problem solving, writing skills (you wrote your thesis, published papers!), organizational skills, mentoring, team work, discussing science with experts, analytical skills, are a few examples of transferable skills gained during your academic years.

I think the list could go on when you also add any skills gained from extracurricular activities. I was very lucky to have a very supportive PI who understood, respected, and encouraged me to get involved in extracurricular science communication projects (e.g., science festivals, art-science collaborations, patient engagement activities, science chats with a lay audience, writing competitions) and teaching. So, I strongly recommend to get involved in activities outside of the lab to broaden your experience and gain new skills.

There are also so many opportunities to write for science magazines and university newsletters; these will get you noticed and will show that you have a genuine interest in medical communication. If you are passionate about science and you have enjoyed writing your thesis and did not see it as a necessary evil than I highly recommend exploring a career as a medical writer in the MedComms field.

There are many great medical communications resources that you can find online and networking events for you to gain insights into the industry. I heartily recommend looking at www.medcommsnetworking.com/ and firstmedcommsjob.com/



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to start with and holding informational interviews with people from the industry through approaching them on LinkedIn.

Lastly, be brave and proactively seek opportunities. Remember to be kind to yourself – changing careers is not easy and checking in with yourself is important to keep you on the right path for you.

"There are so many opportunities to write for science magazines and university newsletters; these will get you noticed and will show you have a genuine interest in medical communication"

PhD Studied

Tissue Repair
University of Edinburgh

PhD Completion

2020

Current Job

Associate Medical Writer
MediTech Media (part of Nucleus Global)

MEDICAL WRITER



Since completing your PhD what jobs have you had?

During my PhD I decided that a career in academic research was not for me, but I knew I still wanted to be involved in science. I began to search for alternative careers that would allow me to use my training while still maintaining a scientific interest. My search led me to the field of medical communications, specifically, the role of a medical writer. I researched the role and attended a medical communications information and networking event, which gave me the opportunity to meet with a number of agencies and learn more about the role of a medical writer. Encouraged, both by what I learned and by my interactions with the agencies in attendance at this event, I applied for a number of entry-level positions and was delighted to be offered the role of Trainee Medical Writer at Mudskipper.

What does your current job entail?

I now work as a Medical Writer at Mudskipper. My role is to work as part of a team to deliver accurate scientific content to help educate healthcare professionals and members of the pharmaceutical industry. I work on a variety of projects, spending my time developing or adapting medical educational materials, working with commercial teams to develop strategic resources and participating in client meetings.

What is the best part of your current role?

My current role has so many positives. The variety of projects I work on keeps me intellectually stimulated, I work as part of a fantastic team, I get to apply the skills I acquired during my PhD and, although I am no-longer lab based, my

scientific interest is maintained. However, the standout aspect of my role to-date has been the drastically different mindset outside academia. The company actively ensures I am happy in my new role, promotes a healthy work-life balance and provides for my training needs to allow me to progress with my career. These aspects, among others, provide a feeling of value, encouragement and support and a sense of security that, in my view, academia could never supply.

What top 3 qualities are required for your job?

1 Team work: everything we do is done as part of a team. I work with account handlers, editors and fellow writers; all working together to deliver our projects to the highest standard, as expected by our clients.

2 Adaptability: every day as a medical writer is different. We often work to tight deadlines and plans regularly change. The ability to swiftly move between projects and adapt to the needs of the team are vital.

3 Detail Oriented: A key part of the role is to ensure the accuracy of the content we deliver. From data checking to referencing to punctuation; an eye for detail will take you a long way.

Lisa's Advice

Do your research and keep an open mind! There are plenty of opportunities available outside academia, but they will not come looking for you. It is important to remember that everyone's career path is different. It's easy to get caught up in the mindset that academia or the pharmaceutical industry are the only available op-



Lisa Kelly

tions, but this could not be further from the truth. There are so many different career paths available, many of which you probably haven't even considered. There are some fantastic medical communications resources to be found online and regular introductory and networking events to learn more about the industry.

Remember your transferrable skills. You'd be surprised at the skills you pick up over the course of your everyday life as an academic. The ability to quickly digest and understand complex information, data presentation, organisation, precision, dedication, adaptability, resilience, team work and project management are all taken for granted in academia but are highly desirable in other fields. Think about your role as an academic and the skills you take for granted, then highlight these in your applications for other careers.

With these mind – be brave. Changing careers is not easy; it's a huge change with a lot of uncertainty. It's okay to be unsure, to be nervous, to question your decision. No matter what opportunities arise, you will never be 100% certain if you are making the correct decision and you'll eventually need to take a leap of faith. Take the risk, safe in the knowledge that everyone else is just as uncertain as you are.

PhD Studied

Inflammation The University of Edinburgh

PhD Completion

2019

Current Job

Medical Writer at Mudskipper an AMICULUM Agency

MEDICAL WRITER



Since completing your PhD what jobs have you had?

As I was approaching the final year of my PhD in multiple sclerosis, it became clear to me that I was more drawn to communicating and discussing my research to both expert and lay audiences than I was to pursuing an academic career. Armed with this insight, I knew that I didn't want to pursue a post-doc without a clear end-goal; however, I didn't have a concrete plan for my next career step. I began to search for careers beyond academia with an open mind and had a few informational interviews with colleagues who had left academia. This helped me to find out more about alternative career options as well as to understand what I would like to pursue and equally important what I didn't want to. I also knew that whatever the next choice would be, it was important for me to work in a field where I was able to continue working towards improving patients' life. Bit by bit, I was adding another piece to the puzzle. I had heard of the field of medical communications: it provides consultancy services to the pharmaceutical industry to help raise awareness of medicines through educating and informing stakeholders such as doctors, nurses, patients, and regulatory bodies. Once I gave it a bit more thought it became the obvious choice, also in the light of my experience in various science communication projects during my undergraduate and PhD years. I was one step closer, I decided to attend a medical communication information and networking event, which gave me the opportunity to meet the

agencies and gain insights into the role of a medical writer. After this networking event, I also spoke with a few friends who were working as medical writers and finally decided to pursue this path. I had secured a BBSRC funded internship with a medical communication agency, but, unfortunately, the start was postponed due to the Coronavirus pandemic. After a well-deserved holiday following the first wave in the pandemic, I felt rejuvenated. I took a leap of faith and applied for an entry-level position in the Academy programme at Nucleus Global medical communication company. I was delighted to be offered the role of Trainee Medical Writer at MediTech Media agency, part of Nucleus Global.

What does your current job entail?

Having graduated from the Academy programme, I now work as an Associate Medical Writer at MediTech Media. My role involves working as part of the editorial team to write high-quality scientific content from clinical trials on a range of materials from scientific publications, medical affairs slide decks to scientific presentations for patient advocacy groups. I am currently working to support the wider Neuroscience business unit where most of my time has been split between two accounts specialised on monogenetic neuromuscular disorders. This suits me very well as I get a great deal of satisfaction from developing an in-depth understanding of the two therapies areas whilst providing diversity of work – no two



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days are alike! Apart from developing or adapting scientific copy, I also spend my time keeping an eye on developments in the field, participating in client meetings and liaising with designers, editors, senior medical writers, and account managers.

What is the best part of your current role?

Well, where to start! Medical communication is a fast-paced environment, largely due to the requirement for clinical trial results to be released to the public and healthcare providers in a timely manner and to a high ethical and scientific standard. I find myself learning new things every day and the work keeps me intellectually stimulated. I work in a very collaborative environment with a great team of like-minded colleagues. The company has a great organisational culture – promoting healthy work-life balance, and supporting my professional development. From my experience so far, working in the MedComms field is more collaborative than research, and I really enjoy this aspect.

PhD Studied

Tissue Repair
University of Edinburgh

PhD Completion

2020

Current Job

Associate Medical Writer
MediTech Media (part of Nucleus Global)

SENIOR MANAGING EDITOR



Since completing your PhD what jobs have you had?

During my research career, I was very fortunate to be involved in organising and producing several scientific manuscripts. I really enjoyed the calm of writing and editing with a warm cup of coffee; sometimes more so than the long days at the bench! Following the successful completion of my thesis, I started working at a medical writing company as an Associate Medical Writer. I had a fantastic experience there and completed a thorough in-house training programme. The editorial office of the Journal Cardiovascular Research moved to Glasgow and advertised for a Senior Managing Editor in late 2017. I applied, thinking that this would be a great opportunity to return to a field of science that I had specialist knowledge in but could combine with my plans for a long-term career in scholarly publishing – and here I am!

What does your current job entail?

My two main roles are to supervise the manuscript handling process by our Editorial team and to support our senior Editors and our publishers in directing the Journal's strategy and policy. Day to day, managing the manuscript handling process takes up most of my time. The office deals with a wide range of international correspondence, oversees and troubleshoots the peer review process and ensure that our accepted manuscripts meet the high standards of the Journal including ethical considera-

tions and adherence to publishing guidelines before passing on to our production team. I am also involved in planning special issues and invited contributions. A smaller part of my job, but one that fulfils my love of writing, is producing some short articles for our Cardiovascular Research Online platform, as well as blog pieces and press releases that highlight some of our best papers.

What is the best part of your current role?

One thing I enjoyed about working in the lab was that no two days were the same, and I worried that in moving to a predominantly "office-based" job, it would not be like this. This could not be further from the truth in my current role, as scientific publishing is constantly evolving to keep pace with the rapid developments in global science. At the bench, my "world" was my experiments and a few other groups who were doing similar things. Now, publishing manuscripts from the broad spectrum of basic and clinical cardiovascular research has infinitely expanded my scientific horizons. At the end of the month, seeing an issue of the Journal in print and having that physical product of your work is really lovely.

What top 3 qualities are required for your job?

- 1 Organisation
- 2 Problem Solving
- 3 Multi-tasking



Heather Small

Heather's Advice

"Find opportunities to write as much as you can..."

...if not scientific manuscripts, then perhaps a blog or the University newspaper. If your research is charity funded, approach them and ask if you can write for their newsletter. Writing for different audiences expands your repertoire. In addition, the more feedback you get on your own writing; the better an editor you become.

There are a number of streams you can be involved in within this type of career: medical writing, editing and proofreading or publishing. I would say my job involves a little of all of these.

Do your research (maybe I am still too much of a scientist!) on what roles interest you and then make a list of companies who are in that field and start contacting them about opportunities. Always offer to volunteer or intern your services if you are able – it's a great way to gain new skills and get a little taster of what the job entails! It is always very impressive if you can talk about current hot topics in the field; it is so easy now to keep up with new developments using twitter or email newsletters and I would recommend this.

PhD Studied

Cardiovascular Sciences
University of Glasgow

PhD Completion

2017

Current Job

Senior Managing Editor
European Society of Cardiology