



Dermatology to drug development

How Monica Shaw moved from the NHS

About six months ago I resigned from my job as a dermatology senior house officer to work as a medical adviser for a drug company. When I told friends I was leaving the NHS, most were encouraging, a few were disparaging, but all had little idea of what my new job would entail on a day to day basis or what it might offer me.

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I came across an advertisement in the *BMJ* which described a job concerned with multicentre clinical trials and the development and marketing of newly produced medicines, with attendance at medical conferences; there were no nights on call. The catch? I would have to leave clinical medicine and join the pharmaceutical industry. Up until then I had a limited understanding of the industry, which I had acquired through lunchtime meetings where our focus was on the free pens. Over the next couple of weeks I looked at the vast amount of information available on the web. Doctors within the pharmaceutical industry were invariably helpful and gave me personal insights into their experiences. Within six weeks of that advertisement, I had joined a recruitment agency, had my interview, and was offered a post as a medical adviser.

Working at the cutting edge of new medication

The pharmaceutical industry has a variety of jobs, including working in phase I units, trial development at all phases, helping to market drugs already licensed, and monitoring pharmacovigilance. Working for a medium sized pharmaceutical company has enabled me to work in several areas and keep any two days from being the same. I am concerned with multiple products across the cardiology, diabetes, and respiratory specialties. I enjoy keeping up to date with these treatment areas and have a greater awareness of the evidence than when I was practising. As part of the clinical development department, I am concerned with phase III and IV trials and have input into study protocols and design. I also help allocate resources to clinicians wanting to set up their own investigations.

Ensuring accuracy of promotional materials

A major part of my job is supporting the marketing team. This is the area that was really new to me. I was unaware that all advertisements, representative training manuals, sales aids, meetings, and even pens must be reviewed by a doctor before being released. I now assess these items according to the Association of the British

Pharmaceutical Industry code of practice, which outlines do's and don'ts for the pharmaceutical industry and handles any complaints by doctors, other companies, or the general public. Although it's much smaller than the *Oxford Textbook of Medicine*, it contains guidance on every situation faced by the pharmaceutical industry during their interaction with members of the healthcare profession. In particular, my job helps to ensure that the company does not exaggerate or misrepresent data and that our representatives are trained to present the data appropriately.

Backroom team

Representatives are the face of the pharmaceutical industry; as doctors we are sometimes less aware of the huge number of people that work behind them. As well as marketers and sales managers there are people who focus on drug discovery, licensing, safety of medicines, clinical development, health economics, and information for the public and for doctors. Through interacting with them I have gained new skills, in particular business and management knowledge that I had not been exposed to before. Being pitched to by an advertising agency was certainly a new experience.

Work with patient groups

Although I no longer see patients, the industry is heavily involved in delivering better health care. I am currently participating in a working group for the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry, which, in conjunction with Diabetes UK, is producing a national scheme to encourage patients to ask about their diabetes medication.

Continuing education

Unlike my old job, I am now based in an office, but on average one day a week is devoted to visiting consultants and general practitioners to discuss trials, going to medical conferences, or attending training courses. The Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine now aligns higher medical training with that of every other specialty. I am therefore in the process of applying for a national training number in pharmaceutical medicine, and at the end of four years (via an exam) I should be awarded a certificate of completion of specialist training.

The only absolute requirement for a job in the pharmaceutical industry is to be registered with the GMC and have two years' experience. Research or business experience are not necessary, but the industry does look for highly motivated, hard-working individuals. It may be an option for doctors looking for a less clinically oriented pathway.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

- www.pharmiweb.com: gives a comprehensive list of jobs, companies, and pharmaceutical news
- www.fpm.org.uk: Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine
- www.brapp.org.uk: British Association of Pharmaceutical Physicians

Monica Shaw
Medical Adviser,
Merck Pharmaceuticals,
West Drayton