

Teaching Medical Writing



Bridging the gap: Academia to industry

SECTION EDITOR



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Editorial

The training of medical writers is not to be taken lightly and requires serious input from industry, established medical writers, and the academics making the transition. Following on from previous articles in *Medical Writing*, Sarah and Adrian Tilly use their experiences of providing a mentoring programme for people wishing to transition into regulatory medical writing to provide advice for both mentor and mentee alike.

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We have recently met a number of academic professionals who want to transition into medical writing, leaving the pressures of the lab behind them and using their hard-earned skills in a different scientific environment. This is a trend that does not seem to be changing any time soon. Our conversations have revealed intelligent, astute professionals who possess all the attributes necessary to flourish as a medical writer. However, the majority struggle to gain the

experience required for a position in this field.

As industry guidelines and best practices are ever changing, the necessity of training medical writers is a given, and mentoring and continuing professional development are in vogue. Some groups and companies promote and practise this extremely well, and EMWA conferences are our port of call for the latest insights, teaching, and networking for medical writers. The question we might ask is, if we medical writers are so good at teaching and developing ourselves, why does there often remain a seemingly insurmountable chasm for highly qualified professionals wishing to enter the field?

Could it simply be that medical writing is now such a desirable career option that the number of applicants far outstrips the number of positions available? We are not sure this is the case, especially as an eye-watering percentage of jobs are apparently not listed on the usual job search engines or even on company websites.¹ So where are these jobs? They are found by doing your research, talking to the right people, and knowing the skills and attitudes required of a good medical writer.

Universities and other bodies offer training or

mentoring for people wishing to transition into medical writing,^{2,3} and many medical writers give their own free time to help others transition into the field. Whilst such mentoring is invaluable, we suggest that that we need to do more. While it helps to provide advice to the daily life of a medical writer, company profiles, and interview tips, this may not increase the likelihood of our mentee to be hired.

We suggest a two-fold solution. First (and there is already a definite move in this direction), companies need to be willing to take on new writers, invest in their training and development, and witness first-hand how rewarding and beneficial this can be. Second, those who mentor need to mentor a little deeper. A recent *Medical Writing* article urged the industry to provide more profound and long-sighted in-house mentoring.⁴ The same is true for those who mentor

people transitioning into medical writing. We need to help them gain appropriate experience so that they really have something to talk about during interviews. As a mentor, you might not think you have the time. You might not think you have the experience. But if you think laterally, there probably is

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some way that you can give your mentee greater exposure to what you do every day. For example, show them real clinical trial documents (of course without breaching confidentiality agreements)

or provide a formal review of their written work. It will require a little more of your time and energy, however. View these people not as a burden, but rather as part of the future of our industry – just a small investment of your energy pays off when you see someone else thrive.

Some people are already doing this, such as the Cheeky Scientist Association and the Health Writer Hub, and we are trying the same at Azur Health Science.

On the other side, for those of you looking to make the transition, please don't expect it to be

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handed to you on a plate. Yes, you have worked hard in your previous field, and yes, you might very well make an excellent medical writer, but there is definitely a new challenge ahead, and you

need to be willing and humble enough to face that and to take one step at a time. Network honestly, find a mentor, and give yourself the best chance possible to find and flourish in your first medical writing position.

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