



networked online and offline with both scientists and established medical writers, and joined the *Journal of Science, Humanities and Arts* as an Associate Editor. I also landed several freelance editing jobs (for international companies and clients), volunteered for EMWA's Public Relations team, became a Section Editor and, eventually, Co-editor of *Medical Writing*, and lead science communication workshops in academic institutions and healthcare organisations. It was a huge investment of time and resources, but it has paid off.

After the EMWA conference in Birmingham in 2017, I was contacted by one of my freelance clients (initially referred to by a colleague from the Cheeky Scientist Association), who offered me a full-time position as a science editor. My career growth within the company happened quickly, and I became the Chief Science Editor within a few months. I managed the content development project and a team of more than 30 writers and six to eight in-house editors. My daily job involved the whole editorial process of scientific content development, and I managed every step from

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researching the topics, assigning them to writers, reviewing the final articles, and managing the publication process and social media impact. It was a job that allowed me to be flexible in terms of working hours and location and was also in line with my belief in the importance of helping people through science and health knowledge. My success in this role was both the cause and consequence of a shift in mindset, from trying too hard to make a good impression and improving skills I was not “so good at” (and didn’t enjoy) to leveraging my natural leadership skills.

After a few months on the job and feeling more comfortable in my role, I embarked on a worldwide voyage as a digital nomad, taking advantage of the job’s flexibility to start a life adventure. Mine was quite an unconventional transition, but in the words of Joseph Campbell

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My current role involves sharing the knowledge I learned along the way with other PhDs through career coaching, mentoring, and consulting, also by being the editor of the “My First Medical Writing” section and leading webinars for EMWA. I also continue to collaborate with the Cheeky Scientist Association and EMWA to encourage and help PhDs to transition from academia to medical writing. As a personal interest, I am using my scientific knowledge and critical thinking, medical writing capacities, and communication skills to help professionals in health optimisation and climate change create awareness and consciousness around these topics within the general population.

I truly enjoy being location-independent, wearing many hats, and working on multiple projects, from one-on-one career coaching to helping organise health optimisation conferences. My ultimate takeaway message would be “Don’t look for your dream job, create it!”



## Somsuvro (Som) Basu, PhD

It was late 2015, the first year of my postdoc. A terrible day in the lab, a critical experiment failed, and I received rejections to applications

for three postdoctoral fellowships. This resulted in me asking Google “What are the alternative careers for postdocs?” Most of the answers directed me to research and development, which was not what I was hoping to find because I was starting to feel “allergic to pipettes.” The fourth answer in the Google search was “Top 20 industry positions for PhDs”, a career guide put together by the Cheeky Scientist Association. I then joined the association and found paths that I was unaware of before. Pens replaced pipettes, at least in the grey cells, and I realised that my true calling was science communications, editing, and medical writing.

Early 2017, I polished my LinkedIn profile and started networking. The networking tips I learned from the Cheeky Scientist Association helped me attract attention, gain confidence, and nurture relationships. My professional ties started to flourish. At that point, Evguenia and Jackie introduced me to EMWA. I promptly became a member and went to a couple of conferences, which moulded the core of my inner medical

writer. At the first EMWA conference, I met my mentor Sarah Tilly of Azur Health Science. This alliance allowed me to achieve a comprehensive knowledge of medical writing and gave me a precious chance to experience first-hand a medical writing project. Furthermore, I was asked to write a full-length feature article for *Medical Writing*, an opportunity which helped me to gain a spot in the sphere of medical writing. My involvement in EMWA’s Social Media team, a pivotal step on this journey, connected me to a broader population of medical writers.

I applied for eight positions: seven medical writing/science communication roles and one project manager role, all through networking. For six of the medical writing applications, I received rejections, but just at that time, I received a message from an ex-lab mate about an open position as a science communication officer. The ex-colleague was aware of my recent activities in the field through Facebook and LinkedIn, so I applied to the position, with the help of a strong referral from my PhD mentor. I went through a



few rounds of online interviews and, eventually, was invited for a site visit. I had individual meetings with two directors, three future office colleagues, and the public relations manager. The discussions revolved around science communications in general and involved specific questions to understand me as a person and a prospective team

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member. I impressed them with a set of plans describing envisioned sections of the research magazine and a plan for the initial months of the job. Six days after the interview, I received the email saying, “We are hiring you.”

In my current role, I manage an in-house research magazine with the aim of

showcasing the exciting research stories of the consortium and presenting current science trends and policies to a broad audience. The job requires close collaboration with scientists, the management team, the public relations team, graphic designers, and photographers. I consider it a dream position for a science communicator, with ample opportunities to learn and share exciting stories not only with other scientists but also the general public. Like Murial Rukeyser, I believe that “The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.”



Clare Chang, PhD, sMBA

I was born in Taiwan and grew up in South Africa, so after receiving my bachelor’s degree, I went back to Taiwan for my MSc, after which I relocated to Denmark for my PhD. In my spare time, I wrote poems and journalled; to satisfy my interest in writing and to make some spending money, I started freelancing during my bachelor’s studies, and the work grew steadily. As life would have it, halfway through my PhD, I realised that I did not want to be at the bench anymore, so I started to look for positions beyond the “research scientist” title and eventually came across medical writing.

After my PhD, in a desperate attempt to not remain at the bench – or at least in academia – I sent out more than 100 applications to all relevant industry positions, including research scientist, clinical research associate, medical writer, and regulatory affairs associate. Only three

applications resulted in interviews, none of which resulted in jobs. I realised that sometimes if it’s not right, then it’s not right, and you should just let it go. The “ah-ha” moment was learning to chase as many leads as possible: Don’t put all your eggs in one basket!

At that point, I joined the Cheeky Scientist Association, and after optimising my LinkedIn profile, résumé, and elevator pitch, I started getting more interviews and phone calls. Because I speak Chinese as a second language and I am a “third culture kid”, and I wanted my daughter to be fully bilingual growing up, I decided to look for positions in Asia. At the same time, I focused my search on my passion: to work as a regulatory medical writer in a contract research organisation (CRO).

I spent 2 months powering through various online courses (including getting a Scientist



MBA), networking, setting up informational interviews, attending networking events, and sending online applications. During this time, I approached and started networking with other medical writers, including Evguenia and Jackie, who provided both references and resources. Networking also led me to EMWA – one informational interview led me to a mentor who encouraged me to both join EMWA and contribute as a writer. I started investigating Chinese CROs and came across dMed in Shanghai, whose company vision I liked. I sent them two applications – one for a medical writer and another for an associate medical writer position – but did not receive any responses.

Around this time, I also contacted a recruiter in Singapore for a position in the Asia-Pacific region. Although the position was already filled, about a month later, the same recruiter posted

another opening for a company in Shanghai, and immediately asked for my résumé. In the initial phone screen, it was revealed – quite surprisingly – that the position was for dMed. The recruiters sent my profile to the company and started to schedule interviews. I had four interviews in 2 weeks – with the line manager, the Head of the Biostatistics Department, the Director of Human Resources, and the Head of Clinical Science. The interviewers went into detail about their passion, values, and the vision they had for the growing company. The whole process felt very natural, like a normal networking conversation. A couple weeks later, the recruiters came back with an offer.

During all this time, I was still networking.

I attended an EMWA conference and met many writers there, including Jackie and Som. The EMWA conference opened up many opportunities: my mentor recommended me to join the editorial board of *Medical Writing* as an Associate Editor, and, while at the conference, I met four hiring managers who were interested in my profile, which led to further interviews.

This coincided with two other interviews outside of EMWA, not to mention the offer from dMed.

In the end, I decided to pursue the opportunity with dMed in Shanghai and turned down the other interviews. The story even had an unexpected twist: although I applied for a medical writer position, the offer I received ended up being for Associate Manager of Medical Writing.

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## Conclusion

Now you know our stories and you can easily see how the three of us supported and helped each other. Moreover, a long list of people and resources helped us successfully land our dream jobs and create the lifestyles we wanted.

Here we would like to share our “secrets” – the key takeaways that helped us identify our true calling and find our paths.

1. Network, network, network! Network with peers and potential colleagues, academics and business people, network online and offline, and network with authenticity.
2. Ask genuine questions about the jobs, roles, and companies you are interested in.
3. Revive old “dormant” connections – they can be valuable assets to your job search. Connect with as many people as you can and tell them about your goals. You never know who will give you your next referral.
4. Rome wasn't built in a day – the same applies to networking. It's never too soon to start!
5. Try to recognise the soft skills you learned, mostly unconsciously, during your PhD training, and leverage all your transferable skills.
6. Start your connections by adding value (e.g., acknowledging the achievements of other people, expressing interest in their experience, highlighting common interests, etc.) before asking for favours, and add as

much value as you can. It always comes back when you least expect it!

7. Seek out a mentor: learn from someone who wants you to grow.
8. Know your value as a PhD!

To this day, we continue to help peers who are interested in medical writing by sharing our knowledge and connections and by inspiring others to the best of our abilities. We are only the “tip of the iceberg” of a vast network of professionals eager to make this world a better place – let's do it together!

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## Disclaimers

The opinions expressed in this article are the authors' own and not necessarily shared by their employers, EMWA, or the Cheeky Scientist Association.

## Conflicts of interest

The authors are not employees of EMWA or the Cheeky Scientist Association and declare no conflicts of interest.

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