

# The Webscout

## Medical Communications

'Medical Communications' is an unspecific term. Sometimes it is used only to describe publications, medical education, and public relations; sometimes it also includes regulatory writing and advertising.

Our colleagues from the American Medical Writers Association offer a technical definition at [www.amwa.org/about\\_med\\_communications](http://www.amwa.org/about_med_communications). 'Medical communications is a general term for the development and production of materials that deal specifically with medicine or healthcare. Medical communicators write, edit, or develop materials about medicine and health.' Hence, this definition closely links to medical writing, as many people working in this business are medical writers.

According to the careers guide *From academic to medical writer* by Annick Moon, the objective of medical communications is 'to educate and inform stakeholders such as doctors, patients, nurses and hospital managers about innovations and perspectives in healthcare'. A Google search displays countless companies offering medical communications services and there is a need for qualified medical communicators. For anyone currently thinking about starting a career in medical communications, Annick Moon's guide gives some advice on how to achieve this, with a focus on the role of a medical writer: <http://medcommsnetworking.com/careersguide.pdf>.

The term 'health communications' – which describes a subcategory of medical communications – is usually used when it comes to promoting health information to the general public, e.g. during public health campaigns ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health\\_communication](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health_communication)).

The so-called 'Pink Book' was published by the US Department of Health & Human Services as a planning guide for health communication programs. It leads you through the planning process step-by-step, from strategy and message development to implementation and impact assessment. It also explains how health communicators can make use of a wide range of methods, including public relations, advertising, and media advocacy. The e-book is available from [www.cancer.gov/publications/health-communication/pink-book.pdf](http://www.cancer.gov/publications/health-communication/pink-book.pdf).

Social media can also be integrated into public health campaigns. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued *The Health*

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*Communicator's Social Media Toolkit*. The main advantage of using social media is that it is interactive. It helps you understand your audience better. Depending on your audience, the channels of communication might differ. As an example given in this toolkit, Facebook had been considered a good tool for a mother-centred program as it has a large population of young women with children, is free, and requires minimal technical expertise. You can download the complete toolkit from [www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/ToolsTemplates/SocialMediaToolkit\\_BM.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/ToolsTemplates/SocialMediaToolkit_BM.pdf).

Finally, let's have a side glance at physician-to-patient communication, which is also covered by the term medical communications. Effective communication between patient and doctor is considered essential to efficient health care. An article on the impact of ineffective clinician-patient communication summarises that it is linked to an increased malpractice risk, non-adherence, and poor health outcomes. According

to the article's authors, addressing communication skill deficits is of the utmost importance: <http://healthcarecomm.org/about-us/impact-of-communication-in-healthcare/>.

TEDMED, the health and medicine edition of the TED conferences (a global community to share ideas and passions), invited experts to a virtual round table on this topic in 2013. They discussed initiatives to improve physician-to-patient communication, from education to technical applications. The recording can be found at <http://www.tedmed.com/greatchallenges/liveevent/277484>

The basic methods to ensure effective communication during a patient interview, including the principles of open questions, empathy, and summarising, are illustrated in the following video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13m6d95yJd8>.

**Did you like this Webscout article? Do you have any questions or suggestions? Please feel free to get in touch and share your thoughts.**

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