Communicating Science

Introduction
There has been a growing interest in recent years in the way in which science is communicated, particularly between the scientific community and governmental decision makers, business concerns and the general public. Science communications covers a broad area of careers focused on the communication of scientific ideas and issues to a wider audience – either members of the general public or a specific target audience such as government and policy makers.

The range of roles is quite broad within this field, and there can be a lot of cross-over with more general media and communications roles. It is possible to work as a science specialist within general media or for a science related organisation.

Scientific journalism
Becoming a science journalist involves working on scientific publications (periodicals, magazines, trade publications) or as a science specialist for the general media, including roles in newspapers, magazines, in-house press as well as on TV and radio.

To succeed in this field you will need the ability to work under pressure and to tight deadlines, as well as a flair for writing succinct prose or conveying ideas effectively in print or through broadcast media. There are also a growing number of opportunities in online media, including science specific blogs and online fora.

It can be difficult to break into this area and relevant journalistic experience is crucial. You could also consider doing a postgraduate course in journalism or in science communications (see section on postgraduate study below).

Another good route into scientific journalism and science communications in general is to offer to research and write material for scientific media outlets. Though these organisations are unlikely to offer graduate schemes or jobs, contributing towards them will show employers that you’ve engaged with the sector and have relevant experience, and they will often pay you for your contributions. As well as the more established, traditional players in the science media, don’t rule out podcasting and new media sites such as Pint of Science (http://pintofscience.com/) and The Naked Scientists (http://www.thenakedscientists.com/)

Scientific press work
The role of a press officer usually involves promoting, or reacting to, scientific news stories. Most large organisations will have a press officer or team, whose job it is to liaise with the press and communicate news about the company at appropriate times. There are also organisations, such as Sense About Science or the Science Media Centre, dedicated to promoting the correct and impartial communication of scientific discovery through the media, and to broker the relationship between scientists, the media and the general public. Key skills for these roles include the ability to convey complex scientific ideas in a clear concise way for the general media and the ability to work under pressure and to tight deadlines. This type of work may be undertaken working for a specialised press agency, or in-house for scientific organisations.

“Science is not finished until it is communicated,”
Mark Walport

Exhibitions, Events and Education
This is a growing field with a variety of niche areas. You might be involved in the organisation of a one-off exhibition within a museum or science centre, or involved in the promotion of science activities in education or to the general public through the outreach work of science communications organisations such as Guerilla Science (www.guerrillascience.com)

Scientific publishing
Roles include editorial assistant, commissioning editor, production editor, as well as opportunities in sales and marketing. Employers include specialist scientific publishers, scientific magazines and healthcare journals.

World Scientific
www.worldscientific.com
World Scientific are an academic publisher of scientific, technical and medical books and journals, offering internships in academic publishing. As an intern, job duties would include researching on academic institutions in the US, Europe, Asia and the Middle East and assisting in organising direct marketing activities and conferences. Email CV to recruit@wspc.com.sg
Medical/technical writing

Medical writing involves much more technical communication of science, often to specialist audiences. Depending on the company context, writing tasks range from the highly technical to the creative or promotional and could include preparing documents for submission to regulatory bodies, technical briefings on medicines for GPs and other healthcare professionals, writing materials for international conferences or promotional literature on behalf of companies. Roles exist in pharmaceutical, biotech and contract organisations as well as with specialist medical writing agencies. A good knowledge of anatomy and physiology is usually required plus excellent written skills. A PhD can be an advantage in this field, and tact and diplomacy are important in order to liaise with authors and clients.

Work experience

Science communications is a relatively compact field, and it can be difficult to break into, especially for first degree graduates with little experience. One of the most important factors in getting your foot in the door is to gain relevant work experience. This might be through volunteering for your local museum or science centre, arranging a period of relevant work experience. Other ways of demonstrating your commitment and picking up relevant skills include:

- Writing for college/local papers and magazines
- Entering writing competitions (particularly on scientific themes)
- Volunteering at a science festival
- Setting up your own blog or joining in online discussion fora

Another option would be to develop relevant skills through working in a related area and then using this experience to develop your career in a science specific area.

Postgraduate courses

There are also a number of postgraduate masters courses in science communications, some of which include a period of work experience as part of the course. These courses will often deal with areas common to any type of science communication, including the relationship between science and the media, scientific ethics and modes of communication. You can then specialise in areas such as print or broadcast media, display work and events, or scientific policy. If you are considering studying one of these masters it is a good idea to check the credentials of the awarding institution: does it have a good track record in helping its students to find work placements or graduate positions? What sort of roles do graduates from the course go on to do? Does the course have any input from working professionals or recognised experts?

Careers Tagged

Careers Tagged (www.careertagged.co.uk) is an online careers resources library. It is populated with resources that exist in our libraries including books, lists of organisations that offer internships, websites and PDF documents relating to career choice, specific occupations and employment.

When searching on Careers Tagged enter tags that relate to the resources you are looking for, for example SCIENCE, POLICY, SCIENTIFIC WRITING, MEDICAL WRITING, MEDICAL COMMUNICATIONS.

Medical communications employers

Listed below are a range of medical communications organisations with links to their websites, in most cases their careers pages. While they all operate in broadly similar areas, their policy interests and ethos may vary greatly, so it’s important to check each organisation’s website and find out more about them before applying to them. This is not only so that you can check they operate in an area that you’re interested in, but also so that you can effectively communicate why you want to work specifically for them rather than one of their competitors.

AXON
http://www.axon-com.com/join-the-team/
AXON are a healthcare consultancy firm, who support clients in medical communications amongst other things. Entry level roles are advertised on their website.

The Campaign for Science and Engineering
http://sciencecampaign.org.uk/?page_id=5833
CSE are a pressure group aiming to improve the scientific health of the UK. Entry level jobs and internships suitable for anyone considering a career in scientific communications or policy are advertised on their site.

Choice Healthcare Solutions
http://www.choicehs.com/careers
CHS is an international medical communications agency, with offices in USA, Dubai and Hong Kong in addition to London. Accept speculative applications, which should include your CV and a covering letter detailing your skills and salary expectations.

Envision Pharma Group
http://www.envisionpharmagroup.com/careers/
EPG are a scientific and medical communications company, who focus more on working with pharmaceutical and biotechnology industry than the general public. Entry level positions are advertised on their website.

Excerpta Medica
http://www.excerptamedica.com/careers/
Excerpta Medica are a medical communications agency. They seem to accept applications even if no vacancies are listed. Send these to h.bakker@excerptamedica.com

Havas Life Medicom
http://www.havaslifemedicom.com/career-opportunities/
Offers paid internships to people looking to develop a career in medical communications. They accept speculative applications for these, which require candidates to submit a CV and an answer to a question. Permanent positions also offered through speculative applications.

Highfield Communications
Highfield Communications are a medical communications agency with a particular focus on medical professionals. They aim to increase understanding of products and therapies. Entry level roles through speculative applications – CV must include a personal profile

McCann Complete Medical
http://www.complete-grp.com/join-our-team/
McCann Complete Medical is a healthcare communications group, made up of a number of different agencies. Fairly high number of vacancies advertised as a result.
A group of 25+ medical communications agencies, providing consulting to pharmaceutical, biotechnology industries as well as healthcare professionals. They are a large company, with lots of entry level positions.

Oxford PharmaGenesis
http://www.pharmagenesis.com/opportunities/
Oxford PharmaGenesis are a Health & Science communications consultancy that works in the healthcare industry. Entry level positions are advertised on their website.

Packer Forbes
http://www.packerforbes.com/index.html
An independent healthcare communications agency, Packer Forbes invite applications for internships lasting between 1-6 months through speculative applications. These internships can lead to permanent graduate positions, should one become available.

Porterhouse Medical Ltd
http://www.porterhouse.biz/html/b_about.htm
A medical communications agency based in Reading. They offer entry level positions, applications through the submission of a CV.

Virgo Health
http://www.virgohealth.com/careers/
A global health communications agency, Virgo Health advertise a number of internships.

Watermeadow Medical
www.watermeadowmedical.com/careers
Offer entry level positions in medical communications.

Windhorse MedComms
http://windhorseservices.co.uk/blog/
Windhorse MedComms offer medical communications and medical writing services. Entry level jobs are advertised on their blog.

7.4 Limited
http://www.sevenpointfour.biz/careers-at-74/
A medical communications agency with a wide range of clients. Speculative applications welcomed, as well as applications for advertised jobs.

When on their vacancies page, search under the business areas “Health & Patient Information,” and “PR & Communications” to find roles in this area.

Real Science Communications
http://www.thisisrealscience.net/jobs
Do a wide range of scientific writing including abstracts, publications and newsletters. Entry level positions available, largely via speculative applications to Jennifer.gabrielle-chapman@publicishealthcare.com

Sense About Science
http://www.senseaboutscience.org/pages/work-with-us.html
SOS is a charitable trust that seeks to address common misconceptions about science in an attempt to reduce the amount of so-called ‘Bad Science’ in the public domain. As well as offering entry level jobs, they look for freelancers to assist with things such as media briefings and publication editing.

Future Science Group
http://www.future-science-group.com/vacancies/
A group of independent publishing companies active in the field of scientific writing. Entry level roles are available with them.

Updated: June 2016
Copyright © 2015 King’s College London, part of The Careers Group, University of London.

Medical & Scientific writing employers

The employers listed below all offer medical writing roles, ranging from technical writing for professionals to informative or entertaining writing aimed at people from both inside and outside of the scientific community.

Springer Science
www.springer.com/career
Springer Science is a global publishing company that publishes books, e-books and peer-reviewed journals in science, technical and medical publishing. Offer 3-6 months internships. Duties range from supporting the department’s day-to-day business to independent work on your own projects. In the last several years, 10 percent of interns were offered permanent positions at Springer. There’s also a range of editing positions available with Springer, in a number of different countries.

Cancer Research UK
http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-us/charity-jobs
Cancer Research UK provides a wide range of publications aimed at both the general public and the scientific community.