

What is Healthcare Communications?

Healthcare Communications means different things to different people, but for our purposes here at Media Contacts it is the umbrella term for the agencies we recruit for in medical communications (aka MedComms), healthcare PR and healthcare advertising.

It is a niche area which, even if you have studied a life science subject, you might not have heard of, so here is an overview. We will give you a feel for what the work involves, the different jobs in the sector and how, as a new graduate, you can get into the industry. Plus, how much you can expect to be paid and how career progression (which can be extremely good in this industry) can work.

The industry

The healthcare communications market is booming right now and has been since before Covid – it is about as recession-proof as you can get.

The core aim of healthcare communications agencies is to increase awareness, and stimulate discussion and purchase of new drugs, treatments and medical devices. Targeted towards a variety of healthcare practitioners, buyers and other stakeholders, it can be a real force for good (which is what attracts many people to the sector in the first place). You'll be working across different channels on projects aimed at pharmaceutical stakeholders, healthcare professionals and patient groups in the UK, Europe and internationally.

People who work in healthcare communications agencies use multiple channels – meetings, advisory boards, publishing, websites, social media, paid advertising, events, direct mail, PR, email, etc, etc. You can work on ideas, events, materials... on every disease area there is, med tech, diagnostics, etc. Whether you're writing the content or organising the strategy and marketing of it, there's always plenty of variety, you will be at the cutting edge of the latest scientific discoveries and finding ways to communicate this information to a variety of audiences.

It's also important to note that some agencies will specialise in a particular field (for example, medical education or PR) and other agencies will have a broader remit. Our clients are varied, so speak with our healthcare team to find the right fit for you. For example, medical education specialists might focus on unbranded projects, whereas other medcomms agencies might concentrate on more promotional work. If you enjoy the combination of science, business and creativity, it's an endless area to work in!

Getting your first job

The most important thing you can do to get started in medcomms is to research the sector really, really thoroughly. Look at healthcare communications agency websites, job boards, industry publications and FirstMedcommsJob.com (the most comprehensive source of career guides, case studies, interview and CV advice there is and it's free) to get a good sense of the industry and where

to start with your applications. Also talk to a specialist recruiter – we are happy to offer you advice and support even if we don't handle many entry level vacancies all the time.

Network as much as possible with people in the industry. Events like 'Working in and around MedComms' are the perfect opportunity to pick the brains of the industry's best and brightest, plus you will meet companies who are interested in hiring you.

Some of the transferable skills which healthcare communications agencies look for are: written and verbal communication; fanatical attention to detail; project management; multi-tasking; creativity; presentation; organisation and time management. Most importantly you need to understand science and be enthusiastic about communicating ideas effectively.

How else can you stand out? Demonstrating familiarity with the healthcare landscape, awareness of industry regulations and associated scientific jargon can help, and if you want to be a medical writer it's a good idea to put together a portfolio of examples of your writing in different styles. If you know the agency you are applying to specialises in a particular therapy area, make sure to read up on that. It is also good to read trade publications such as PME and PharmaTimes so that you are aware of topical issues. Also make sure you're up-to-date on general pharmaceutical news and current affairs – you should at the minimum know who the current health secretary is and some of the issues facing the NHS and GPs.

Finally, many hiring processes nowadays will include some sort of task, such as a short writing test and/or presentation. You might be asked to complete a short project, for example talking about a communications campaign you particularly admired. Bear in mind, they are simply assessing your communication style, how you think and the way you address a task. Read the brief carefully and follow the instructions to the letter, and that's half the battle won.

Make sure your CV and cover letter state specifically *why* you want to work in healthcare communications, what it is about the work they do that interests you and why you think you will be good at it. It might be that working collaboratively to find effective ways to help pharmaceutical companies meet their brand objectives fascinates you; that you absolutely love writing and would like to do it in a varied and fast paced team environment; you want to contribute to the greater good or you want to be constantly learning about new therapy areas and treatments and then communicating that information. When you have thoroughly researched what agencies do and the job responsibilities within them, you will be in a stronger position to say which aspects of the work appeal to you and why.

Job responsibilities

There are a range of jobs within healthcare communications agencies, and you might find you have a definite preference for client services over medical writing, for example, or that a hybrid project management position which also involves producing some content, suits you best. There is a wealth of information about agencies and jobs at FirstMedcommsJob.com but for a basic example of the difference between writing and client services, medical writers develop and deliver high-quality communication materials to clients across different projects and therapy areas, they write manuscripts, abstracts, posters, newsletters, websites, detail aids, conference materials (from invitations and speaker notes to delegate info and meeting reports), banner ads; they liaise with KOL and as they progress will mentor and review other writers' work.

As medical writers progress up the career ladder they often choose either the editorial route, heading up teams of writers and ultimately becoming editorial directors, or they may choose to specialise in particular scientific areas, becoming scientific team leads and then scientific directors in time – these will be the people to provide top level scientific knowledge to clients and internal teams alike.

Account executives, however, are the people who pull the whole process together, who provide day to day client liaison and attend meetings, brief creatives and medical writers, conduct research for pitches and contribute ideas, project manage and work closely with the client's brand or medical affairs team. There is a route up through client services leading to director and these are often the people who ultimately head up agencies (although business leaders do also come from the editorial route), driving business, providing senior level client counsel on strategy and leading teams.

Salaries and career progression

The continuing growth of the industry and demand for specialist skillsets means agencies are offering ever more attractive salary packages. Your background may play a part in determining your starting salary, but the industry rewards on merit and you can find your salary rising quickly once you have secured your first job and proven yourself.

The starting salary for an associate medical writer is typically £25,000 - £30,000, and once you've been promoted through medical writer to senior medical writer level you could be earning £40,000 - £50,000 or more. Experienced freelance writers (with minimum 3 years' experience in a medcomms agency) can be earning £300-500 or more a day

For an account executive, you'll start earning c£24,000 - £28,000. By the time you're an account director you could be on anywhere between £50,000 - £65,000 or even a bit more.

Contact Details

To find out more about how Media Contacts can support you:

Connect with Julia Walton or Maz Reive on LinkedIn

Email careers@media-contacts.co.uk

Call 020 7359 8244

Visit www.media-contacts.co.uk