



Wanted: Great Communicators to Shape the UK Health Agenda

Healthcare communications is a diverse, dynamic and challenging career. Okay, every piece of careers literature you have ever read starts that way, so let us put all our cards on the table.

Open any daily newspaper or magazine, surf the news on-line, turn on the radio or TV and there are literally hundreds of health stories covered every day. Reports about the latest drugs developed to treat breast cancer or obesity, NICE denying patients access to treatments for Alzheimer's disease, government policy and service provision – very little is more topical or interesting than our health.



So how do you think these stories make the front pages? How can your friendly 10 o'clock news reporter be an expert about asthma one evening and bowel cancer the next? How is it possible for doctors to know about the latest treatments available to treat their patients' diseases as soon as they receive a licence?

Well in most cases it's highly likely that a healthcare communications professional, working in an agency, a pharmaceutical company or perhaps a patient organisation has played a central role in making sure that this vital information has been communicated clearly and in a balanced way to the people who need to know.

Who does it and what are the benefits?

Even people who work in healthcare communications sometimes have difficulty in explaining what it means in practice. Perhaps the easiest way to describe it is a marriage of three areas – business, art and science.

It is the blend of these three disciplines that often appeals to people when they are first attracted to the healthcare communications industry. You get to exercise your creativity, your flair for the written word, your love of working with people, your strategic prowess, your head for complex information and passion for doing something worthwhile – sometimes all in one day!

The fact that PR makes use of knowledge and skills drawn from a number of areas also means that candidates are welcomed from a wide variety of academic disciplines. A real interest in health and medicine is essential, as is the ability to express yourself in both the written and spoken word. A science background may be useful but there are plenty of people who have picked this up on the job.

If you are looking for a career with variety and your motivation lies in no two days ever being the same, then healthcare communications should be on the top of your list. Also, once you've got a few years experience it can be very well paid!

Healthcare communications professionals will have been supporting their clients or their colleagues to bring the latest health news to the nations' fingertips; writing press releases, briefing journalists, arranging events at cutting edge international meetings attended by thousands of delegates or getting leading health experts together to agree the best way to manage a fatal or debilitating disease.



What sort of people work in healthcare communications?

The majority of people in healthcare communications have degrees, but not all join straight from university. People move across from nursing, journalism, charity fundraising and many more. The variety of people in healthcare communications leads to a dynamic work environment, with teams of exciting professionals from a range of disciplines.

Those with a taste for some European and international travel are also attracted to healthcare communications. Almost all pharmaceutical companies are global companies and will often commission communications agencies to work on global projects which will involve travel to offices in Europe and often the USA. Additionally, congresses and meetings where exciting new health discoveries and the latest scientific data are announced to doctors and the media worldwide are held in countries across the globe – so you could well be hosting a press conference in Orlando, arranging an event in Stockholm or launching a new product in Monte Carlo.



Who would I work for?

A job in healthcare communications could mean working for a whole range of organisations. Members of the HCA are mostly pharmaceutical companies and PR/communications consultancies. The roles on offer will quickly provide you with experience of conducting PR campaigns on a variety of medicines and disease areas and allow you to see the variety that this kind of career can offer.

Talent Search 2012

Talent Search 2012 has been launched by the HCA with an explicit aim: to find 100 Communications Managers/Account Managers by the year 2012.

These individuals are the science, business, art and PR graduates of today and the communications talent of the future. Whilst career progression differs for everyone, with the right attitude, training and on-the-job coaching, the Talent Search 2012 recruits will be working as Communications Managers/Account Managers by the time the UK hosts the Olympics.

If we've captured your imagination and you want to do some more research, the HCA website is a good place to start. You will find useful information, case studies and a list of member companies who are willing to consider applications for work experience placements and/or permanent graduate positions.

www.hca-uk.org/careers

Still not sure if healthcare communications is for you?

Making the transition from education to employment can be a daunting proposition. If you are still considering whether a career in healthcare communications is the one for you, it may help to talk it over with someone who can tell you how it really is.

The HCA Recruitment Sub-Committee is a group of individuals from different consultancies and pharmaceutical companies who have come together to ensure that, as an industry, we are continuing to recruit and retain the best talent around.

These lovely people have volunteered themselves to provide a telephone information service for people like you considering a job in healthcare communications.

If you would like to speak to someone working in the industry, then send an email to career@hca-uk.org giving us your contact details and an overview of your circumstances and what you are looking for and we will help you as much as possible.