

TIBBS Career Blitz Career Profile Questionnaire

1. Please provide your name and employer:

Natalie Patzlaff, PhD, United Therapeutics Corp

2. What is your current title and how long have you worked in your current job?

Manager, Medical Communications
Global Medical Affairs

I have worked in medical communications at United Therapeutics since April 2020 and received my current title in March 2022.

3. Where did you get your PhD and what discipline was it in?

University of Wisconsin-Madison, Molecular and Cellular Pharmacology

4. Did you do a postdoc? No

5. What are your main daily responsibilities?

I manage a variety of projects (manuscripts, infographics, websites, visuals, etc), so every day I create, review, and gather feedback for these projects from internal (corporate), external (healthcare providers) collaborators. This all must be done within rules regulating pharmaceutical companies (compliance framework).

6. What are the keys to success in your career field?

Reading and understanding scientific literature, being able to clearly explain scientific concepts to a variety of audiences, creativity, project/time management, collaboration, the ability to work with many personality types and accept criticism are all important.

7. What were the most important factors in choosing your career path and current employer?

I wanted a job where I would continue to learn, to read, and present research. These are the things that I liked most about my PhD. I also wanted variety in my work. I was excited by the innovative science at United Therapeutics. I also liked the idea of being part of a growing team where I would have some influence.

8. What activities (if any) did you participate in that helped you be successful in obtaining your job?

Honestly, the thing that helped me get my current job is having a job in industry. I was told that with a PhD, once I had a job for two months recruiters would start calling me. That is exactly what happened. I had a medical writer title at a CRO with a good job description on LinkedIn (in reality it was not as interesting) and a recruiter contacted me for the exact job I thought I would never get.

I did not do this, but I highly recommend an internship in industry. It will put you leagues ahead of other PhDs 'without experience'. I know most advisors will disagree but think about taking a summer unpaid by your advisor and getting an internship or delaying depositing your thesis so you are still eligible for an internship.

Every day things: writing manuscripts, presenting, making posters, reading lots of scientific papers, volunteering, and attending resume seminars.

9. What 1 or 2 pieces of advice do you have for people who want to land a job like yours?

My general pieces of advice for any job is to meet people and get job referrals. Joining professional societies like AMWA, ISMPP, and Women in Bio are great for education and getting to know people and their roles. Specific to a medical communications job, a medical writer is a great starting point for many types of roles and there are always people and agencies who are hiring.

10. How is the work/life balance in your career field and how much of a factor was that in your career choice?

In leaving my PhD, I had two job goals: 1) Not to work weekends, 2) Be home for dinner (work 9-5). Besides occasionally traveling to conferences, which I love, these are my typical hours.

I think corporate culture plays a large role in work expectations. And here we have a lot of responsibilities as a small team, but we are not expected to work late. Occasionally, I have done some late work for sponsored events after hours or to meet a deadline, but it is not the norm. Within pharma, I believe most people with my role work 9-5, if you work as a contractor or consultant or for a medical writing firm, you may work longer hours to meet deadlines for multiple clients.