

INDUSTRY

NHS

MAY THE WORKFORCE BE WITH YOU

Synergy Vision's Ffiona Dawber has experienced what it's like on both sides of the force and believes that working across the sectors could send your career into orbit.

Crossing the career divide

NHS, pharma and agency are different sides of the coin, but many people never take the plunge to 'cross the divide' into a different healthcare sector. Some even hold a perception that 'jumping ship' from your particular area of expertise is career suicide. As someone who has significantly changed direction twice in her career, I have discovered that you rarely lose out if you build your career on cross-sector foundations. What is more, the depth of experience that someone with multi-sector knowledge brings to healthcare, only serves to increase standards and practices across the board.

Clinic to commercial entity

According to the ABPI, in its publication *An insight into careers for doctors with the UK pharmaceutical industry*, there are over 1000 pharmaceutical physicians, working as clinical research physicians, clinical pharmacologists, medical advisers and consultants.

There are also myriad ex-nurses, working in pharma and devices companies - many in senior management - who have leveraged their skills and invaluable experience in a clinical setting.

Transitioning from ward nurse to research nurse in the NHS was the first step on my journey. I moved to GSK (then Glaxo Wellcome) as an associate/research scientist. It was a significant change. I missed the multidisciplinary team, and needed time to

embrace the bigger vision of running and developing clinical programmes, rather than individual patient care. The scientific challenge of understanding a therapeutic area, and constant exposure to new thinking and ideas, was hugely stimulating, and I thrived on it.

Pharma to service provider

The next move for me seemed natural, after I identified a need for a full-service medical communications agency, where the consultants really understand, first-hand, the challenges faced by pharmaceutical clients. The reality was harder! I had become accustomed to having the multifaceted support that a large corporation provides, and it was a challenge to go back to doing almost everything for myself. More positively, it has been a joy to be able to continue working with industry clients, and enjoy the flexibility and creativity that an agency allows. In particular, as a third party expert, it is possible to work with clients in identifying, and acting on, key strategy and communication opportunities, more rapidly than working in house.

Service provider to pharma

This move seems to be less common but - from those I have spoken to - that have made this change, it is no less valuable. Most importantly, these individuals bring a greater knowledge of service provider capabilities to pharma companies; building trusting relationships between the two. Claire Williams, Pharma

Marketing Consultant, who has transitioned between pharma and service provider, and back to pharma agrees, saying, "pharma companies appreciate that you understand how agencies operate and, therefore, better able to manage them, while service provider teams tend to like that you are 'one of them'."

Claire Clibborn, Scientific Knowledge Manager, has also made the move from service provider to pharma, enthusing, "it was a great move for me as it allowed further development into a fully scientific-focussed role, and transfer my project management experience from agency; something that was recognised instantly by my new colleagues."

What is right for you

Often it boils down to how risk averse you are and how willing to break out of the comfort zone of your existing role in order to foster a dynamic approach to your career.

Additionally, each organisation, within the sector, appeals to people for very different reasons. Pharmaceutical companies offer a state-of-the-art environment in which to work. If you enjoy working on long-term clinical and commercial projects, often spanning many years, there are great opportunities to acquire highly specialised knowledge. In contrast, people seeking a creative and fast-paced environment, where they can collaborate with like-minded people on a diverse range of projects and brands, may find an agency environment suits them better.

If you want to really engage with the patients, which the whole industry is operating to support, then working with a healthcare provider – be it private sector, or the NHS – may be the best way to make a direct contribution to people's lives, on a daily basis.

On the face of it, and looking at size, governance, culture and services offered, these organisations are completely different from one another. Look more closely, however, and they have a lot in common, making the switch from one to another less intimidating.

Each organisation wants to improve patient quality of life, be it through the provision or supply of medication, healthcare or education. Many of the skills necessary to be successful in one role are applicable to others, including the ability to manage key relationships, communicate clearly and provide a high level of service, regardless of the customer, consumer or patient.

We should all move around

Cross-sector moves are likely to improve knowledge skills and understanding, whichever the direction. There is a strong argument in favour of a diverse career history, offering solid experience to the healthcare sectors.

There are many reasons for this. Individuals seeking a change of direction are almost always highly motivated to succeed. Furthermore, they enrich the workplace culture, increase the skill set of the workforce, provide a fresh perspective on existing work practices and frequently arrive with a valuable pool of professional contacts.

Nick Chapple, Senior Business Development Manager, Synergy Vision, has worked across all sectors of healthcare, including the NHS and pharma. He explains: "Those that make the move across all elements of the healthcare industry gain a valuable understanding of how the different areas fit together and benefit each other,

“Each organisation wants to improve patient quality of life, be it through the provision or supply of medication, healthcare or education”

moving toward a more integrated workforce.”

Depending on the experience of new staff coming onboard, other potential benefits to an organisation include, the ability to offer a broader range of services (particularly useful for agencies wishing to improve their visibility and professional reach), greater insight into the industry and an enhanced reputation within the wider sector. There is also a likelihood that taking on individuals with wide-ranging experience may boost motivation among the workforce, by challenging engrained practices and bringing new ideas to the table, with a knock-on effect in terms of staff retention.

Gerry Hagan, Independent Consultant, moved after 20 years as a GP, from NHS to pharma. He explains the benefits from both sides. "You bring the experience of actually working with patients, the real pharma customer, and therefore that extra soul to the intellect of pharma"

"In return you get the intellectual challenge of working with bright people, combined with the possibility of making a difference to far more patients' lives than you ever could as an individual, in healthcare," he adds.

What are the potential pitfalls?

As in any walk of life, a career change does not come with a guarantee of success. It can be hugely rewarding, but it can also be a daunting. Employees in new, unfamiliar roles, typically face a steep learning curve – there is often an expectation that they must learn quickly. To ease the transition,

it is useful to brush up on the culture of the organisation and obtain complete clarity on the expectations of the role.

There is also a real possibility that new starters, moving from a large organisation (typically, pharmaceutical companies or healthcare providers) to a smaller company (agency), and vice versa, may face a culture shock.

Agencies are known to be flexible and adaptable organisations, with a strong focus on innovation. Meanwhile, decision-making, and the requirement to follow strict processes, frequently restricts the ability of larger organisations, such as pharmaceutical companies and healthcare providers, to adapt and evolve.

From an organisational perspective, the recruitment process must be robust enough to ensure that applicants are appropriately selected for their skills and competencies, but also to ensure that they are a good 'fit'. In order to get the best out of individuals, employers should allow sufficient time for new staff to fully integrate and adapt to a new role, and this may take several months for full immersion.

Provided that the potential pitfalls of crossing the divide can be avoided, or at least mitigated, the movement of professionals, with wide-ranging backgrounds, across the sector, can be beneficial for all parties. Ultimately, this broad range of experience can only be of benefit to the individual, organisations and ultimately, patients.



Ffyonaw Dawber

Are you ready to take the plunge?

- Do you know and understand the environment in which you currently work, inside out?
- Can you define how the experience that you have could add value in a role within a different sector of the healthcare industry?
- Do you enjoy new challenges and looking at a situation from a different perspective to find a solution?

- Are you an agile thinker, prepared to flex your approach to suit your environment and the people around you?
- Do you know someone in a target sector that you can talk to about this?

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions you might want to look at career development opportunities outside your current pathway.