



Voices of Experience

By Heather Haley, MS

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Interviewee: **Linda Runft, PhD**

Medical Writer II, Kendle International
Thousand Oaks, CA

AMWA: How did you become interested in a medical writing career?

Linda: As a graduate student and postdoc, I found I enjoyed writing up my research results for publication. I also actually enjoyed writing my dissertation. While in academia, I also had the opportunity to be an ad hoc reviewer on several manuscripts for a peer-review journal. These experiences inspired me to consider medical writing as a possible career choice.

AMWA: What is your education and work background?

Linda: After obtaining a BS in biology from the University of Washington, I worked for 2 years as a lab technician at Oregon Health Sciences University. I then went to graduate school at the University of Connecticut Health Center, where I graduated in 2000 with a PhD in Cell Biology. After graduate school, I worked as a postdoc at the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB) from 2001-2004.

AMWA: How did you job search for your first position? How long did it take you to find this position?

Linda: This is my first job as a medical writer. I started job-hunting in the summer of 2004. I first heard about Kendle from a friend at UCSB who knew one of the medical writers in the Kendle Thousand Oaks office. I got in contact with this medical writer to learn more about Kendle and about medical writing. I later applied to Kendle when several medical writing positions opened up in October 2004. I started working at Kendle in January 2005, so the job-hunt took about 5 months. I found I used the Internet a lot in my job search. A Web site I periodically searched for medical writing jobs was "The Write Jobs" site (www.writejobs.com).

AMWA: Do you have any tips for people who are trying to approach medical writers in organizations where they want to work?



Linda: In retrospect, I probably should have given myself more time to find a job. I started looking for a job a couple of months before the grant that funded my postdoc research ended. I was still looking when my grant ended, but luckily my postdoc advisor had money to keep me on for a few months while I continued job-hunting. I was very fortunate to have found a position as quickly as I did that involves work I enjoy doing. My job

involves writing up scientific research results for publication, which interested me more than regulatory medical writing.

AMWA: What surprised you most when your first started working at Kendle?

Linda: One of the first differences I noticed between the private sector and academia was the tighter security employed by private companies to protect intellectual property. In 6 months as a medical writer, I've learned more computer passwords than during the entire 5 years I was a grad student!

Linda: I noticed your title is Medical Writer II, indicating a nonentry level position. How were you able to negotiate this?

Linda: At Kendle, a Medical Writer I has a BS/MS (no experience) and a Medical Writer II has a BS/MS (with experience) or PhD (with or without experience). Since I had a PhD, I started at Kendle in a Medical Writer II position. Though this is how writers are categorized at Kendle, it varies between companies.

AMWA: What is a typical workday like for you?

Linda: My job involves writing up results from clinical drug trials into abstracts, posters and manuscripts for publication in peer-review journals. A typical workday usually involves reading clinical study reports, writing documents based on the clinical study reports, and attending meetings. I work in a team with 3 other medical writers. We usually meet once a week to discuss our projects and parcel out assignments. I have not yet been to a AMWA annual conference as a Kendle writer, but I know medical writers

do attend the conference and various biomedical science meetings.

AMWA: What do you like best about your work?

Linda: As a medical writer, I've really enjoyed learning about how clinical trials are conducted and about the science behind the drugs being tested. I've also enjoyed getting to know the other medical writers I work with.

AMWA: What do you find most challenging?

Linda: One of the biggest challenges has been developing the people skills for effectively and quickly obtaining feedback from the scientists and MDs listed as authors on a document.

AMWA: What resources do you recommend for someone in her or his first medical writing position?

Linda: AMWA has been a wonderful resource—especially the core curriculum workshops. Reference books that have been valuable have included the *Merriam-Webster*

Dictionary, Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary, the American Medical Association Manual of Style, and the Gregg Reference Manual. I also use the Internet all the time to find information about medical disorders and to download papers. I use the NCBI PubMed literature search service quite a bit. I've also learned a tremendous amount through interactions with the other medical writers and medical associates whom I work with.

AMWA: Any additional advice for people just starting out or looking to transition into medical writing?

Linda: The best thing I did was to talk to a medical writer who worked at the company I was interested in applying to. This gave me a very good idea of what the work would be like and the type of atmosphere I would be working in.

If you are an experienced medical writer (more than 5 years' experience) who would like to share your career thoughts and experiences with students, please contact Heather Haley at cove0033@umn.edu.



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