

only medics: finding the cog for the pharma machine

Many medics like to feel they're members of an exclusive club: it's one characteristic of the profession that's remained relatively unscathed, despite seismic shifts in status, science and society since a 'union of gentlemen' founded the Medical and Chirurgical Society, the forerunner of the Royal Society of Medicine, in 1805. The numerous extant Royal Colleges, societies and associations underscore that medics prefer organisations that reflect their specific interests. Even within a pharmaceutical company, medics' backgrounds, attitudes and values can differ markedly from those of marketers, clinical research associates or sales teams

"Medics like to feel they're special – and in some ways they are," says Dr John Hall, Vice President and Global Head, Strategic Drug Development Unit, Quintiles. "They are usually the only people in a pharmaceutical company who have sat on the other side of the table to a patient. And they have a relatively privileged position in society that non-medical staff in a company can't claim. They often need cosseting. They need to feel that they are valued and respected in the way that many medics feel they deserve by right."

Perhaps that's one reason why recruiting the right medic for any particular position is notoriously difficult. Finding the right candidate means looking behind the skills

and experience at the person – a level of insight that requires a detailed understanding of the company, position and medic. Many recruitment companies don't have the specialist focus or expertise that allows them to match candidate to client. Indeed, medics are often a relatively small part of a recruitment agency's portfolio.

So it's perhaps surprising that, until recently, no pharmaceutical recruiter exclusively addressed medics' needs. Two years ago this October, Elaine Ford founded *only medics* to exclusively handle the recruitment of pharmaceutical medics. Despite its success, Managing Director Elaine remains wedded to her initial vision and often turns down assignments to recruit in other disciplines. As

we'll see, this dedicated approach allows *only medics* to add considerable value for clients and candidates.

The struggle to find medics

Pharmaceutical companies often struggle to fill medical vacancies. After all, Elaine estimates, fewer than 2,500 medics work in UK pharma. Ann Meyer, Human Resources Director at Sanofi Pasteur MSD adds that the National Health Service is becoming increasingly attractive for medics, which further limits supply. And the combination of abilities needed by pharmaceutical medics – people skills, commercial nous and medical excellence – isn't fostered during medical training. "Many of the medics we see don't

have the right balance of medical, people and commercial skills," Meyer says.

In contrast, *only medics'* clients are sometimes spoiled for choice. Recently, Meyer asked *only medics* to fill a single vacancy. Of the five medics who attended first interview, Sanofi Pasteur MSD called three back for second interview. Two candidates were just what the company needed. "We knew that we'd need another medic at the start of 2008, so we brought the appointment forward and employed both," Meyer says. "We struggle to find good medics for pharma. Having two good people on the list is almost unheard of."

Similarly, when Hall set up the Strategic Drug Development Unit at Quintiles, he needed to recruit seven or eight highly

experienced medics. "I needed people with at least 10 years' experience in pharma, as well as a serious academic background," he says. "Elaine and her team at *only medics* did an excellent job of finding people that met this exacting brief."

Nevertheless, the right medic needs to fill the right role in the right company for client, candidate and *only medics* to succeed.

'The total specialism offered by only medics gives it an edge over other recruitment agencies'
John Hall, VP and Global Head, Strategic Drug Development, Quintiles



Elaine Ford



Rob Ford

"Recruitment isn't rocket science," Elaine says. "But to match the candidate, company and position, the consultant often needs to think creatively and really understand the areas and issues. And you need to be proactive: momentum is central to recruitment."

More than matching skills with vacancies

That approach is why *only medics* adds value for client and candidate. Many agencies recruit for a diverse range of roles – they're supermarkets selling mass-market paperbacks, rather than a smaller specialist bookshop that knows its subject and what its customers want. "Clients and candidates tell us that some consultants don't understand the difference between MBBS and MRCP or the roles working with compounds in development or marketed products," comments Rob Ford, *only medics'* Operations Director.

"Occasionally, you find a particular consultant in a non-specialist agency that has this level of knowledge," Hall comments. "The difference is their focus: they may deal with a medic one day, a clinical research associate the next, and marketers the day after. The total specialism offered by *only medics* gives it an edge over other recruitment agencies."

Elaine's scientific and pharmaceutical

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Elaine and Rob Ford remain committed to specialising solely in the recruitment of pharmaceutical physicians

industry background allows her get to grips with the technical aspects of the brief. Based on this detailed understanding, *only medics* works closely with HR departments and the medical team to ensure they recruit the right person. As a recent report by think-tank Demos commented, modern recruiters “match people with organisations, not just skills with vacancies”. Demos envisages that “a more personalised approach” will characterise the recruitment sector’s development over the next few years. However, *only medics* already implements the Demos vision to the benefit of clients and candidates.

Understanding the organisation means knowing which companies integrate medical and marketing into business units, and which prefer to keep the disciplines at arm’s length. Some clients insist on, for example, employing a cardiologist for a cardiovascular drug. Others employ medics irrespective of background, assuming that they’ll get up to speed rapidly.

Matching the person means knowing that some medics whose personality means they are less likely to stand their ground could face a rough ride from a ‘hard hitting’ marketing department, over issues such as interpretation of the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry Code of Practice, especially when working together in the intimacy of a business unit. Such candidates might be better suited to a company with a collegiate style or a non-marketing function in the same company. “On the other hand, an assertive medic who believes in creative

confrontation may be the antithesis of the person needed by a company that prefers negotiation and consensus,” Rob says. A medic who has a particularly entrepreneurial mindset and is willing to get involved in areas outside the ‘medical’ job description might be especially well suited to a biotech or smaller company. As Demos notes, it’s all about finding the right person for the right job.

Adding value to candidates

Elaine adds that *only medics’* ethos of adding value means that it stays closely in touch with candidates and clients. “There are often unavoidable delays in any recruitment process. It’s important that we explain delays, we don’t want people to think that we’ve abandoned them,” she says. “Keeping candidates and clients up-to-date is a small courtesy that really pays dividends.”

Her clients agree. “Elaine works hard to ensure that clients and candidates remain involved throughout the whole recruitment process, which can take months even if the person fits the bill perfectly,” Hall says. “The personal service is excellent,” adds Meyer. “Elaine keeps you informed. The level of communication is exactly right and the specialist approach means that companies

and medics trust *only medics.*”

Similarly, Rob ensures that *only medics’* website is an information portal rather than the usual list of jobs. “HR professionals with many of our clients refer to the news, glossary and explanation of training and so-on posted on the *only medics* site,” he says proudly. Elaine adds that HR managers call her for advice on benchmarking salaries and, ironically, retention strategies. Candidates contemplating jobs handled by other agencies sometimes approach *only medics* for career advice. Elaine says that she rarely refuses such requests; the approach pays off over the long term. Recently, a candidate asked Elaine’s advice about a medical director role handled by another agency. After accepting the job, he recruits all his medical staff through *only medics.*

Rob adds that *only medics* is also committed to increasing the pool of medics working in pharma. It offers training courses for pre-screened medics who want to switch from the NHS. And it has good relationships with several organisations supporting pharmaceutical medics. “We often get medics call up who want a move into the pharmaceutical sector because they are fed up with night shifts or being on call. But we are looking for a lot more than this,” Rob says. “They should be motivated to join the pharmaceutical sector rather than trying to escape from the NHS.”

“I’ve attended one of these training days,” Meyer adds. “The training bridges the gap between the NHS and the sector. The medic doesn’t come into the sector entirely ‘green’ – they know what to expect. That’s valuable for an employer and the medic.”

Next time you wander around a science or industrial museum, ponder for a moment the complex beauty of a Victorian steam engine. Each cog fits perfectly to ensure the machine works efficiently and effectively. Medics are a central cog in the pharmaceutical machine – clinically, commercially and legally. If you don’t get the right fit, the entire machine can grind to a halt. The dedicated value-added approach taken by *only medics* helps you get the best performance from your pharmaceutical machine.

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