

# Not-So-Typical Medical Information Career Paths

A person in a dark suit is running away from the viewer on a dirt path along a cliff edge. They are wearing a pair of large, light blue, bat-like wings. The background shows a sunset or sunrise over the ocean with waves crashing against rocks. The foreground is filled with low-lying green and yellow vegetation.

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**T**he pharmaceutical industry Medical Information (MI) function has a critical customer-facing role to provide unbiased, evidence-based, and scientifically balanced information to its customers in a timely manner. The phactMI Code of Practice identifies three core elements to which MI departments should adhere: 1) clinical and pharmaceutical expertise 2) scientific balance of medical responses; and 3) quality standards. MI professionals typically have advanced science or healthcare degrees in order to respond to medical inquiries with scientific and medical expertise. With the advanced degrees, MI colleagues are better positioned to take on new challenges with courage and integrate their critical thinking skills in day-to-day tasks of communicating health information to customers.

In many large, multinational pharmaceutical corporations, the MI function exists at the global, regional, and local levels. MI colleagues work on regional and global therapeutic teams and have the opportunity to join strategic initiatives. MI colleagues are also encouraged to explore other opportunities presented through global, cross-functional teams or secondment roles in other functions.

Below, two global MI colleagues who work for the same company discuss their unique journeys and ways they obtained opportunities: Michelle Quinlan, based in New York headquarters office, and Dolly Randhawa, based in the United Kingdom (UK) office, shared their diverse professional experiences.

Michelle graduated pharmacy school with her Bachelor of Pharmacy and then obtained her PharmD from St. John's University, NY. She previously worked in community pharmacy, consulting pharmacy, as a pharmacy director in the hospital setting, and now works in Medical Information for North America. Dolly graduated from a four-year master's pharmacy program at University College of London, became a registered pharmacist, and worked in the hospital pharmacy

setting. She entered industry through the company's UK MI team and ultimately became an MI specialist for the Europe, Middle East and Africa region.

When asked about the top three skills one would need to be successful in medical information:

Michelle:

1. **Very good written and oral communication** – especially as a customer-facing organization.
2. **Good analytical skills** – to dissect the question and determine what information is relevant.
3. **Great teamwork and collaboration skills** – to efficiently work cross-functionally especially when concerning content for scientific response documents.

Dolly:

1. **Understanding the customer's needs** – measured with goals to ensure customers have the best experience in obtaining information. MI aims to meet the customer where they want information delivered, whether it be online, on the phone, or written content.
2. **Courage** – be courageous to generate new ideas in how to work with customers.
3. **Agility** – it is important to adapt to changing environments, especially at a global company. Information technology constantly evolves, requiring companies to keep up with the changes.

In addition to their core MI experiences, Michelle and Dolly had unique opportunities to pursue secondment roles. A secondment is a temporary opportunity obtained through an interview process typically in a different area or function of interest, which may or may not end with a continued offer in that position.

Michelle completed a secondment with the Medical Affairs group as a Medical Director in the sickle cell disease space. Michelle learned about a new disease state, authored above-brand content and presentations, and attended congresses. She was in an outward-facing role directly interacting with healthcare providers and patients, which she thoroughly enjoyed. Ultimately this gave Michelle a new perspective working with patients and advocacy groups, which has since been valuable in her current MI role. As she is on the patient strategy team, her previous experiences provided a unique perspective in working with patients and healthcare professionals. Michelle keeps the patients and caregivers at the forefront of all her work, especially due to her personal experience interacting with patients.

Dolly completed her secondment as the Global Content Operations Manager, where she set up a global team from scratch. This undertaking via the secondment required her to relocate and grow a team of successful content writers. She learned how to manage people, how to be flexible and creative in engaging with colleagues, and how to implement best practices with creating a new MI standard for global document creation. She is currently handling all operations fluidly, but it wasn't that easy in the beginning. Dolly learned that there is nothing too big to take on or lead, as she may have thought earlier on in her career. This perspective allowed her to enjoy the transition into the secondment role, establish working relationships with a new team and create a global vision to create content to ultimately provide medical information to customers and impact patient care. At the completion of the secondment, she has officially transitioned to this role and looks forward to the future of global content creation.

The insights shared above showcase unique career pathways in MI. Michelle and Dolly had impactful experiences and continue to push the envelope. They took advantage of opportunities and as a result brought value to their respective teams. Active participation and ownership of responsibilities enables a professional to develop and overcome challenges regardless of the work environment. These are the types of experiences that should be leveraged during interviews for a medical information role.

*References available upon request.*