

OPINION

The Hottest Jobs in 2008 Revealed

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One pharma president recently told me he wanted to be reincarnated as a bilingual regulatory director. The world would be his oyster because he would have the pick of the working place.

The president's offbeat remark at a recent industry forum reflects the changing employment demands in the industry. Regulatory affairs (RA) candidates, with strong communication and leadership skills, are in short supply and can name their price.

Project managers liaising with CROs on a global level are another group in high demand. As more Japanese companies expand globally, more foreign companies in Japan want to conduct global clinical trials, hence the need for these positions.

In 2007, Optia Partners placed several such project managers, and I see the demand increasing. A few years ago, these global managerial positions did not exist.

Our clients are now seeking international project managers to coordinate global studies. The positions are based in Tokyo, and report to Australia, the US or Europe. This new breed of manager needs to be able to coordinate with other project managers throughout Asia while communicating with a global client in Japan. Our clients are seeking project managers who can work on multiple projects and be knowledgeable about Standard Operating Procedures, ICH Guidelines and GCP.

Medical doctors continue to be in strong demand, particularly in a pharma company's medical affairs; however, the gap between information on new products and the knowledge of GPs remains wide.

The success of Lipitor in Japan would have been

greater with a stronger medical affairs team, one executive from Pfizer remarked.

Demand for marketing talent also continues to be strong, but it is no longer sufficient for product managers to have 10 years, MR experience, good relationships with KOLs, experience in producing marketing communication materials and strong English.

Marketing directors and presidents now want candidates with advanced marketing skills. They want top people who can analyze, plan, strategize and execute.

The need for strong marketers is evident in the growth of pharmaceutical consulting. Last year we saw candidates from Chugai, Lilly, Sanofi, and AstraZeneca all join consulting companies.

Mergers and acquisitions and the redundancies, lay offs and resignations that follow, abound in the pharmaceutical industry and an increasing number of candidates are taking responsibility for their own careers. They are not relying on their companies to look after their families for life.

We are finding that more candidates are willing to broaden their opportunities with CROs, Japanese venture capital groups and privately owned companies.

As Schering acquires Organon, Abbott moves to Tokyo and foreign companies continue to jostle for Japan's top pharmaceutical talent, 2008 is already shaping up to be another year of movement in the pharmaceutical employment market.

And there are golden opportunities for talented people who know where to look.