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Job movements

From mergers and acquisitions to a move towards outsourcing, the pharmaceutical employment landscape is being tugged by global forces, sending jobs in different directions. Development and manufacturing jobs are shifting from the United States and Europe to overseas (see page 902). Meanwhile, mergers and cost-cutting could reduce the number of overseas sales jobs. Analysts speculate that Pfizer, which, after a merger with Pharmacia, is now the world's largest drug company, is set to shed up to 12,000 jobs from its global workforce of 122,000. The question is, which jobs will be cut, and how will the rest of the industry respond?

The conventional wisdom is that most of the cuts will come from Pfizer's global sales force — and most of those from outside the United States. But any cuts to the sales force will have broader repercussions. Inside the company, employees are apt to feel less secure about their future. And although the company is building a US\$35-million research facility in New Haven, Connecticut, concerns about long-term stability might mean it will have a hard time filling it with scientists from outside the firm.

Analysts predict that other companies will follow Pfizer's lead and trim their global sales forces — and perhaps other employees, too. This merely illustrates a trend that industry-watchers have been plugging for years: the drug industry is moving away from drug development and sales towards discovery and marketing.

But jobs in drug development won't disappear completely. Discovery will still occur at some level, and will continue to expand in mid-sized and large biotech companies. Development and manufacturing will tend to be outsourced to India and China, as those countries continue to increase their capacity and offer lower labour costs. At this point, it is only the sales force that will be asked to do more with less.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



Contents

CAREERS AND RECRUITMENT

Global outsourcing in the drug industry p902

CAREER VIEW

Scientists & Societies
Horizons in Molecular Biology
Graduate Journal
A story to tell
Movers
Arne Henden p904

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RECRUITMENT	
ANNOUNCEMENTS	
EVENTS	