

naturejobs

**JOBS OF
THE WEEK**

The drug industry has not been kind to its employees of late. With profits falling, pharmaceutical companies have been laying off staff, and thousands of scientists have felt the pinch. In January, Pfizer cut its work force by about 10%, a loss of 10,000 jobs. In July, AstraZeneca announced it would cut 7,600 jobs, again about 10% of its workforce. A few days later, Johnson & Johnson announced cuts of 4,800 jobs (about 4% of the workforce). The cuts affected employees across the United States and Europe. And last week, biotechnology firm Amgen announced lay-offs of between 2,200 and 2,600 people (12-14% of its workforce) — the company's first major lay-off.

Such 'realignments' have reverberating effects on the life-sciences job market and beyond. Along with scientists, marketing, sales and support staff have lost their jobs. Some biotechnology firms, which increasingly rely on drug-firm partners for revenue, have been forced to downsize as well.

Most drug companies blame dried-up drug pipelines. Blockbuster pills such as Viagra are increasingly rare finds, and the drugs that are far along in the development stages are increasingly hard to get approved for sale. High-profile tragedies, such as those related to Merck's Vioxx, haven't helped matters.

But there are still jobs out there. As we reported last year (see *Nature* **439**, 886-887; 2006), companies continue to recruit even in lean years. And the most recent numbers from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics suggest that employment for chemists and biologists in the US manufacturing sector for pharmaceutical and medicine is expected to grow by about 25% by 2014.

So scientists looking to industry for a livelihood need to do their homework. When and where were the company's last lay-offs? What are the company's bread-and-butter product lines? When do the patents run out? Do generic drugs threaten the company's bottom line? What else is in the pipeline?

Of course, there's no ignoring the most commonsense question of all — in the event of one of those inconvenient realignments, what's my plan B?

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