

The inside track from academia and industry

# The time is ripe

With pharmaceutical companies outsourcing drug testing, jobs in clinical research are growing fast.



Mike Mortimer

If you are considering a career in clinical research, your timing could not be better. Pharmaceutical companies are increasingly opting to outsource clinical testing of potential new drugs. This shift is fuelling massive growth among the contract research organizations (CROs) engaged in doing the work — a trend that seems likely to continue for some time.

Pharmaceutical companies are under increasing pressure to develop blockbuster drugs quickly and at the lowest possible cost, while fending off challenges from manufacturers producing generic versions of drugs that have come off patent. Clinical studies typically account for nearly half of the billion-dollar cost of developing a drug, so companies are now tending to engage CROs to run the trials in order to maximize investment by reducing the time required to develop and bring a new drug to market.

A 2006 Goldman Sachs report concluded that the CRO industry is expected to grow at an annual rate of 13% through to 2010, while biotech and pharma spending on drug development

is expected to grow at an annual rate of only 11.1% for the same period — suggesting that the role of CROs is expanding in size and importance.

This is leading to a growing backlog of trials among some CROs, which translates into a need for more staff.

Here at Quintiles Transnational, for example, we anticipate expanding our workforce by up to 5,000 people over the next five years.

CRO professionals not only need to have a good understanding of science and the pharmaceutical industry, but should also be intellectually inquisitive, individual self-

starters. A clinical-trial monitor, who often visits investigator sites, may identify ways to improve patient enrolment or assure greater accuracy of data entry, for example. And project managers need to find ways to improve clinical-trial protocols through the use of new technologies.

With CROs proliferating, it is also worth assessing whether your potential employer matches your career aspirations. Seek out a company that will invest in you, support your growth and development, and offer a culture that meshes with your work habits and lifestyle.

Career-development courses at CROs are a good way to build a skill-set for the profession. At Quintiles, for example, our staff have access to more than 150 technical courses and over 2,000 professional-development classes covering various aspects of clinical-trial preparation, planning, conduct, monitoring and management. Courses range from an introduction to clinical research to those on specialist subjects such as human gene therapy.

Career-development courses may also focus on the causes, diagnoses and treatment of specific disorders — useful for clinical-trial monitors, or project managers who need to learn more about a particular disorder or want to specialize in a specific therapeutic area.

A wide range of practical courses is also offered, for would-be project managers, for clinical-trial monitors (in subjects such as drug accountability) and for drug salespersons (in business and accounts management), to name but a few.

Training courses take place through Webcasts, CD or DVD, teleconferences, online, and on site with clinical-research associates. Web-based teleconferences also offer distance learning so that staff can listen to others' voices and hear each other's questions.

The growth in CROs is offering opportunities at all levels. Many new hires start out as clinical-research associates, typically with a nursing or life-science background. Within three to five years they can advance to supervisory and then management positions. This dynamic environment means

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companies need to be progressive as employers, offering flexibility and mobility. For instance, employees should be able to work from home; they should be encouraged to move within the company; and, if possible, be given the opportunity to spend time working abroad.

The CRO industry is clearly growing, as are the associated careers opportunities. For those with the right educational background, and a willingness to take on cutting-edge clinical science and to learn managerial skills, an engaging and stimulating career awaits. ■

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#### Web links

Association of Clinical Research Organizations

♦ [www.acrohealth.org](http://www.acrohealth.org)

Drug Information Association

♦ [www.diahome.org](http://www.diahome.org)

Regulatory Affairs Professionals Society

♦ [www.raps.org](http://www.raps.org)

Project Management Institute

♦ [www.pmi.org](http://www.pmi.org)

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