

# MISSED OPPORTUNITIES IN PHARMA?

**Students and young professionals from non-scientific areas are missing out on potential careers in the pharmaceutical industry because of the misassumption of who companies are looking to hire.**

A new survey has shown that heads of recruitment in the pharmaceutical industry could unwittingly be overlooking a rich source of talented, young employees.

According to a recent *New York Times* Job Market Survey, many young professionals and students in the United States believe that they are not qualified to work in the pharmaceutical industry because they lack a science background (FIG. 1). Although recruiters might be aware of the need to market career opportunities in pharma to graduates in chemistry, life sciences and, increasingly, mathematics and statistics, the survey suggests that outreach programmes in colleges are needed to promote the many opportunities that exist for non-scientists.

The online survey of 1,200 students (aged 18–25 years old) and college-educated working professionals (aged 22–30 years old) revealed that only 7% of college students and 14% of young professionals would consider joining the pharmaceutical industry. Of those who would not consider pharma as a career option, 47% of young professionals said this was because they were simply not interested in science, whereas the majority of the students (65%) assumed that they would not be sufficiently qualified because they lack a scientific background.

As might be expected, the survey showed that college students studying marketing and information technology (IT) were less aware of the career opportunities in the pharmaceutical industry than those intending to pursue scientific research as a career (FIG. 1b). But, given the increase in investment in sales and marketing and the requirement for IT expertise as computational tools become more prevalent in the drug development process, the presumption that these ‘non-scientists’ have no place in the pharmaceutical industry couldn’t be further from the truth.

Veronica Foote, Global Head of Staffing at Novartis, says that the company looks to employ a large proportion of non-scientists in global marketing, sales, finance and project management in clinical development. In these fields,

the emphasis is on recruiting enthusiastic, intelligent people who are willing to learn the ‘pharma ropes’. She explains, “Within global marketing at Novartis there are two sectors: medical marketing, for which we predominantly employ physicians; and brand management, for which we recruit non-scientists who have proven brand marketing experience. Often they will have an MBA or have held a senior position at a consumer goods company.” There is potential in other areas too: IT, finance, human resources, strategic planning and business development are key sectors where Novartis employs non-scientists.

So, is a lack of awareness of the possibilities for non-scientists within the pharmaceutical industry creating a shortfall in recruitment for these positions? The current situation is mixed. Baschi Dürr, a spokesman for Roche, says that Roche has no problem recruiting non-scientists into the company. In fact, the difficult positions to fill are those where they require highly specialized biochemists, chemists and physicians who are in limited supply.

The situation is different in Japan, according to Ken Ishiwata from the personnel department of Sumitomo Pharmaceuticals. Sumitomo employ non-scientists for careers in their sales department, but they have difficulty recruiting these staff, because many other pharmaceutical companies are recruiting from the same pool of people.

One reason for this difference could be the differing climates of these companies. Novartis has had to expand rapidly to accommodate an increasingly robust drug development pipeline, notes Foote, and has therefore tended to recruit people with 2–3 years of experience in the required sector. But, to sustain company growth, they are now encouraging applications from graduates as and when needed, and are focusing on developing people’s skills in-house. “We are working closely with corporate communications to really position the company as employers of non-scientists” Foote says, “The biggest issue for us is to make people understand that we do hire great non-scientists.”

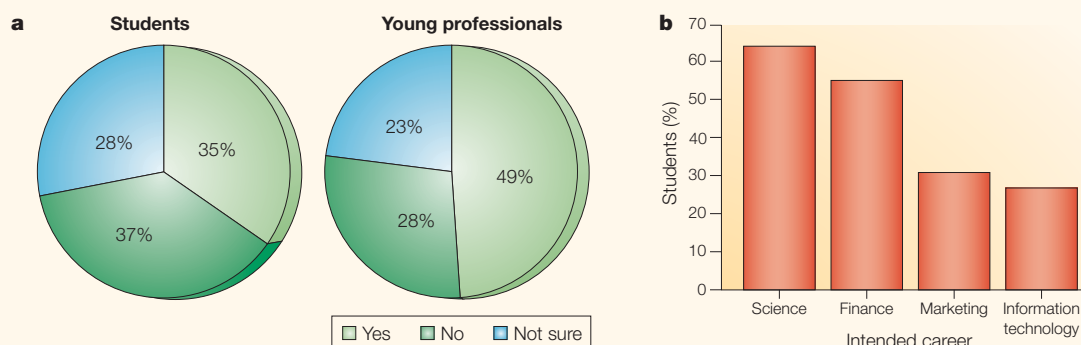


Figure 1 | **Students' and young professionals' perceptions of potential careers in the pharmaceutical industry.**

**a** | Approximately one-third of students and less than 50% of young professionals believe that they are qualified for a career in the pharmaceutical industry. **b** | The percentage of students in four disciplines who felt that they would qualify for a job in the pharmaceutical industry. Students following a scientific career path felt they would qualify for a career in the pharmaceutical industry, whereas those working in marketing and information technology were less aware of such opportunities. Source: *New York Times* Job Market Survey. Contact Jisun Kim for further information (kimj@nytimes.com).

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