

PSI General Profile Competition

Winning entry by:

Nick, MDS Pharma Services



To be honest, if somebody had told me back when I was an even younger lad that “when I was older” I would be a biostatistician there would’ve been a number of sequential reactions:

1. A bio wha...?
2. What’s a bio-statistician...?
3. Possible laughter, an explanation of where that thought could be put, or a combination of both.

Now I actually am a biostatistician I still find myself wondering how on earth I got here. This is generally due to the following:

1. I know that PSI are doing their bit to make our industry more known, but to be honest I’d never heard of this job before about 4 years ago.
2. As far as I was concerned, with my mathematical ability I should go into a completely different area, such as drawing.
3. I wanted to be a Top Gun pilot/footballer/surgeon/MC Hammer/James Bond.

I realised that I liked doing maths. Well, I liked a lot of the things that went with it, like the football, beer, climbing, beer, meeting new people with ideas that you would never think of in a million years, beer, helping to run the Maths Society, helping to organise my own pub crawls... Seriously though, I realised that this may be something that I might want to do in the future.

Then I got to the end of my three years, and very good times (with a lot of work as well) and for all intents and purposes, began to panic. There’s a Kylie Minogue video for the song “Breathe”, where she floats around in a slight state of nakedness; I felt like that but with a bit more clothing. I realised that there were all these possibilities, but none that would just fall into your lap, and that after a great time for many years I would now have to make some sort of decision as to what I would do for the rest of my life and that there was no going back (yes, it’s all very melodramatic).

Then something fell into my lap. To cut a long story short, I received a call from a large Pharmaceutical company asking me if I would like to apply for a position they had going as a Phase I Clinical Data Manager...

And so began my life in the Pharmaceutical industry. I got to work with Clinicians, programmers, CRF designers, data entry, coders, epidemiologists and doctors on a daily basis, oh and a couple of statisticians. At this point I realised that I was the only Maths

graduate in DM, a light bulb shone and I took the option of quitting work and going back to University full time to do an MSc. in Statistics, and now here I am.

After a brief stint working for the government (I am not cut out for the civil service) I landed a job with MDS Pharma Services. I had some previous SAS experience, but no real statistical experience in a work environment, and when I started I must admit I felt a bit overwhelmed; I soon felt really settled in what I was doing. I've attended numerous training courses since I have been here and I was surprised that I actually felt at home talking about my field with much more experienced statisticians. Both the people at work and the statisticians that I have met in the process have made me feel very welcome. I now have the chance to contribute to the analysis plans for studies, program listings and statistical tables (you'll never believe how many ways you can present an adverse event), have meetings with clients and now have some belief that I know what I'm talking about. It's also nice to have been able to help design and randomise a study that may cost millions of pounds.

Having worked for both Pharma and CRO companies, I appreciate that there are some large differences between the two. I now work for a CRO and enjoy the diversity that this affords. I work on many different areas, such as Oncology, Neurological, Renal, among others, and each of these areas brings its own challenges when working with the data.

The interesting thing I find about statistics is that every day I seem to find a new area in which stats is applicable. For most of you I guess this isn't surprising, but when I now have to explain what I do to the average-Joe on the street, I realise that most people's perceptions of statistics are completely different to mine. It's not just about the numbers that you see in the newspaper, many of which are poorly presented or interpreted in weird and sometimes not so wonderful ways, it's also about the ability to say that things are so (with a certain amount of precision) and, in the case of my field, to work with many different professions to achieve results which may (or may not) prove to be the thing that saves lives of all sorts of people, including those around you. I have met many interesting people so far, working in many different interesting areas, and it's nice to know that there are still things going on in the world that are beyond the thoughts of most people. I feel that it certainly beats thinking and talking about money all day long, as may have been the case with the economics, and it's certainly more interesting than accountancy ("Oh, you do maths. So what do you want to be - an accountant?"... "Yes, there is obviously nothing else that I would ever be qualified to do").

The bad thing is having to constantly spell out your job title, trying to say it while drunk, and trying to explain what you do ("Yes, I test the drugs on myself" ...).

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