

SPIN Statistical programmer account, Matt

It was early in the spring term of the second year of my BSc Mathematics and Computer Science degree at the University of Surrey when I first encountered the role of a statistical programmer in the pharmaceutical industry. There I was in the university careers office looking at jobs for my professional placement year when I noticed an advert for programmers at a company called AHP, more commonly known today as Wyeth. “Why does a pharmaceutical company need programmers,” I immediately thought, but after a trip to town to replace the student jeans with shirt and tie, and a successful interview, I embarked on a year that was not only enjoyable, but also introduced me to a career as a statistical programmer in the pharmaceutical industry.



I am now approaching my third anniversary as a statistical programmer, at the CRO Chiltern International, and I can honestly say I've thoroughly enjoyed my time in the industry. From writing my first SAS program during the early days of my placement year through to leading the programming on a complex multi-study expert report, the role has continually enhanced my programming and personal skills. I have had the opportunity to work on all phases of clinical trials working directly alongside many interesting professionals from all areas of the pharmaceutical industry.

I've found myself in the industry purely through fortune, but going back to my initial question “Why does a pharmaceutical company need programmers”, it's now apparent that the role of the programmer is vital in the drug development process, requiring a different skill set to that of a statistician. From protocol review to final analysis the statistical programmer is involved in many aspects of the clinical trial working alongside and assisting the study statisticians. In my short time spent within the industry the role has provided me with the challenges and goals I require, and I look forward to my future as a statistical programmer in the pharmaceutical industry.

I have also had the opportunity to be an active member of PSI throughout my early years within the industry. The ITIT (Introduction to Industry Training) course, which I am currently attending, has been a great way to meet other programmers and statisticians new to the industry, whilst learning about the other key aspects of the drug development process. It also provides a great excuse for a night out on the town to discuss the finer points of SAS and to have a few beers... well maybe just the beers this time and we'll leave the SAS for later!