

TIBBS Career Blitz - January 2012

Career Profile of a Scientist in Big Pharma: Jennifer McCafferty, PhD

What is your current title and how long have you worked in your current job?

Vice President of External Supply Quality since September 2011. I have been at GlaxoSmithKline since 2006 and was at Merck 1995-2006.

Where did you get your PhD and what discipline was it in?

UNC-Chapel Hill in Analytical Chemistry with Mark Wightman

Did you do a postdoc?

no

What are your main daily responsibilities?

I lead a team of colleagues across the global that provides oversight and management for the CMOs (Contract Manufacturing Organizations) that make medicines and consumer products on behalf of GSK. My team is responsible for assuring that the CMOs have proper processes and systems in place to guarantee that all products are of the high GSK Quality standard. My team also provides the management for any deviations or product quality issues that we find working with our CMO partners.

What are the keys to success in your career field?

A strong technical and problem solving skill set, integrity, leadership, communication and curiosity.

What were the most important factors in choosing your career path?

I was very interested in the measurement side of chemistry from work as an undergrad and two summer internships so decided to pursue Ph.D. in Analytical Chemistry at UNC. It was clear that many industries need good scientists who can measure things as part of product development or technical support. In considering the various fields, the pharmaceutical industry really ignited my interest because of the possibility of spending every day trying to make medicines available to people around the world who need them.

What 1 or 2 pieces of advice do you have for people who want to land a job like yours?

Get an advanced degree in biological or chemical sciences and obtain some real experience in the industry through internships, co-ops, post docs, etc. so that you differentiate yourself and your skills from your peers. The biopharmaceutical side of chemistry has a lot of growth in pharma right now so it is very useful to gain skills with bioassays and other techniques on the biological side of chemistry. Also, seek a variety opportunities to develop and demonstrate your ability to lead and work with diverse teams. Network with people in the industry and determine what would make you the most attractive candidate for an entry level role.