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Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators
Autumn 2016

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Elaina Crehan describes her role as a scientific writer

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society is the professional membership body for pharmacists and pharmacy in Great Britain and is an internationally renowned publisher of medicines information. Pharmaceutical Press, the publishing arm of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, produces digital and print content to meet the needs of the pharmacy and healthcare professions. This includes information on the design, manufacture and therapeutic use of medicines, in addition to educational and career development material, and industry news and analysis.

There are a number of editorial teams within Pharmaceutical Press, focusing on different content sets. The team I work in coordinates the creation of content for digital and print major reference works on formulation, herbal medicines and toxicology with regular online updates varying from monthly through to biannually. As a Scientific Writer, I manage the workflow and content creation for one publication as well as contributing to the other reference works within the team.

I primarily work with the *Handbook of Pharmaceutical Excipients,* which is published jointly with the American Pharmacists Association (APhA). This publication covers the essential data on the physical properties, safety, handling and regulatory status of excipients. Excipients are the functional components of a drug product added to the active ingredient, for example, to increase the stability of the drug product; to aid in its processing and manufacture; to provided increased patient acceptability (for example, improved taste, smell, or texture); or to modify bioavailability, release site or rate of the active ingredient. First published in 1986 as 145 monographs providing "a reliable and useful source of technical information on the properties of excipients and the quality of dosage forms," *Excipients* now contains over 380 monographs. More than 140 experts in pharmaceutical formulation or excipient manufacture from across the globe regularly contribute to the compilation of monograph information.

Managing a product on a biannual revision cycle means my days are varied. Typically, on arrival I will review any emails I have received overnight, often from my colleagues in different time zones. Next, it is our daily team-planning meeting to review and assign workloads, before returning to manage *Excipients.*

Over the course of a revision cycle, I work together with external editors and an International Steering Committee, all experts in their respective fields, to direct the creation and updating of content within *Excipients.* Either meeting in person or by email, we will regularly identify areas of interest, based on our knowledge of this subject matter. My role then includes commissioning our team of experts to create and update content to reflect these important areas and maintain the currency of our publication.

Another large part of my role is to ensure that the presentation of content is in the correct style for the publication, and that the content is both factually correct and relevant to its users. For both content review and content creation, I will assess technical information predominantly from peer-reviewed journals, but also from relevant databases, government organisations and reference works. My knowledge of both the topic area and focus of the publication allows me to identify research and technical information that is valuable to our users, and to judge where further discussion with colleagues, editors or other experts is necessary.

Content available online at www.medicinescomplete.com and in print undergoes rigorous QA before publishing. As part of this process, I coordinate the transfer of the approved monograph changes into a local XML-based, content management system. This content is then validated and final sign-off is only given after passing this QA process. For the final publication stage of an online content update, I also write a 'What's new' document for a newsfeed outlining the monographs that have been updated in the release.

The variety of my role and the content I work on is incredibly interesting. I enjoy working to create and maintain essential information for those involved in the development, production, or regulation of pharmaceutical preparations, as well as the daily management of the development and workflow of the publication. C

Excipients are the functional components of a drug product added to the active ingredient. Some examples of excipients and their uses include gelatin, commonly used to form capsule shells; lactose, which has applications as a tablet binder and diluent; alcohol and water have applications as solvents; and polyvinyl alcohol, a synthetic polymer, has uses as a stabilizing agent for emulsions.

References

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