

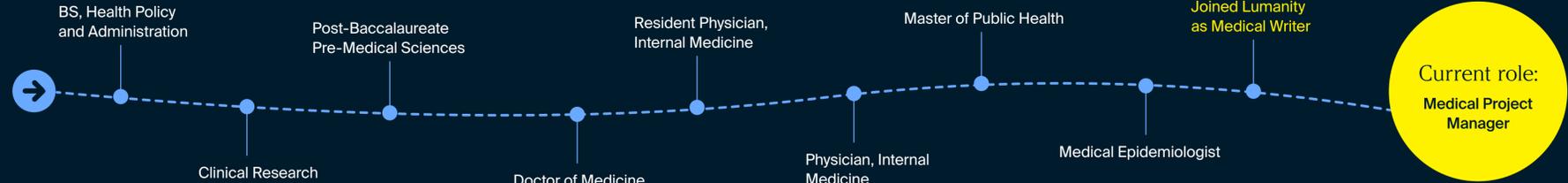
Many roads lead to MedComms: our pathways are different and diverse



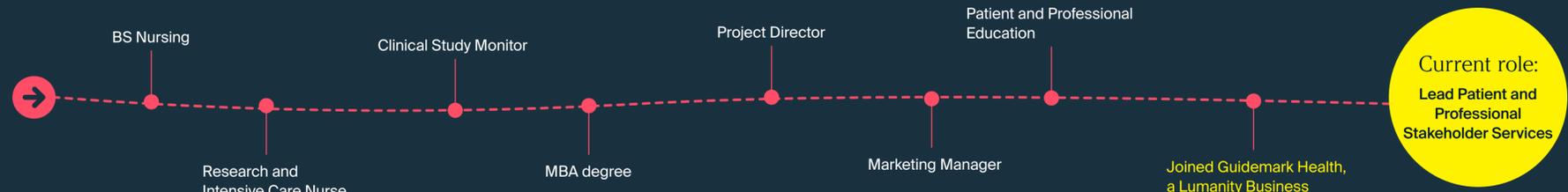
Shilpa Khobragade
Principal Medical Writer
UK Communications
1.5 years at Lumanity



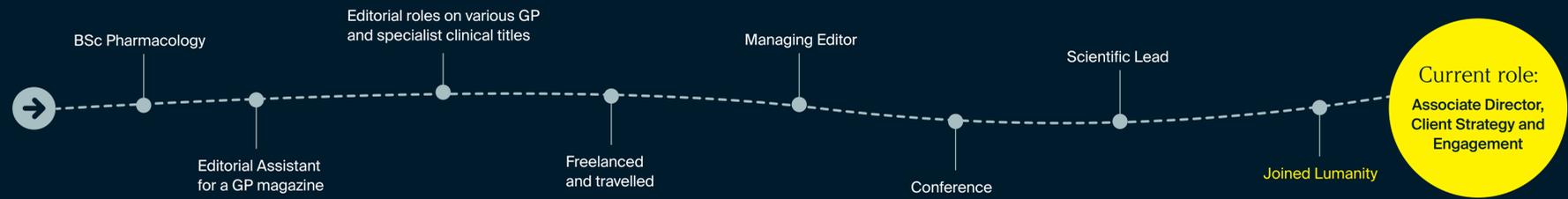
Kurt Kunz
Medical Project Manager
US Communications
1.5 years at Lumanity



Valarie Leishman
Lead Patient and Professional Stakeholder Services
Guidemark Health
1.5 years at Lumanity



Sharon Pickett
Associate Director, Client Strategy and Engagement
UK Communications
6 months at Lumanity



Q&A

How did you find yourself in MedComms?

→ **Shilpa Khobragade:**

After completing my medical degree and working as a medical intern for a year, I started my career as a Clinical Research Physician at a contract research organization (CRO), Lupin Bioresearch Center. While working at the CRO, I was asked to author the clinical study protocols for Phase I studies as the new guidelines required a medic to be involved. This is how I got introduced to regulatory writing. As a medical writer, my role was diverse and involved working closely with doctors, scientists, and other subject matter experts to create documents including clinical study protocols, reports, informed consent forms.

From there, I worked my way up to become Clinical Research Manager, which involved not only writing but reviewing both the in-house and outsourced protocols and reports written for regulatory submissions. Thereafter, I got married and moved to the UK, and took up a PhD course at Loughborough University. Because of my previous experience, writing and defending my thesis was the easiest part of my PhD (getting the results was the toughest part!).

After completing my lab work, I started looking for writing jobs as I enjoyed the writing aspect of my jobs the most throughout my career. I got introduced to MedComms when I got my first job in the UK as a Science Writer with a brand communications agency.

→ **Kurt Kunz:**

Through medicine, I developed an interest in population health as a means of touching more lives than clinical practice alone can allow and of extending my reach to vulnerable populations. Likewise, messaging for large audiences was central to public health. Because written, oral, and visual communication were enjoyable skills relevant to all my work, I was pointed to MedComms as a way to unite these interests with my experience in clinical research.

→ **Valarie Leishman:**

My career as a nurse in research led to me doing clinical research at a pharma company. I became interested in marketing while studying for my MBA and pursued that role, also in the pharmaceutical industry. As a marketing manager I worked with many MedComms agencies and saw how they translated science into stories that drive education and product adoption. I then had the opportunity to move to a blood cancer patient advocacy organization where communication was integral to my responsibilities in educating healthcare providers and patients. Through my work at the patient advocacy organization, I was able to move to MedComms at Lumanity where I get to understand and illuminate the patient's view point.

→ **Sharon Pickett:**

After graduating in pharmacology it was either lab science, the ambulance service or medical journalism that I was drawn to, and journalism seemed to be a happy compromise of continued learning and reasonable pay.

My publishing career has been really varied, covering writing, editing, medical education and events, and there seems to have been a relatively natural progression towards medical communication, which encompasses elements of all of these things.

Was it what you were expecting?

→ **Shilpa Khobragade:**

From working as a pharma industry employee and outsourcing work to other CROs to now working for industry clients in a MedComms setting was a bit challenging. To my surprise, I found that my role and responsibilities were reversed. From the writing perspective, the basic rules and principles were the same but I had to quickly learn and adapt to the style of writing required for different types of target audiences.

→ **Kurt Kunz:**

Infectious diseases and publications have been familiar ground, although the pace of publications and content development in an agency setting working for industry clients took some getting used to. Exposure to so many therapeutic areas (and so much variety even in infectious diseases) was a pleasant surprise.

→ **Valarie Leishman:**

I anticipated listening to and sharing the patient's voice on their journey with their illness and treatment. I hoped to understand their concerns, their unmet needs, their hopes and desires and to communicate these concerns to the pharma clients and to the public. Yes, my expectations have been met and surpassed.

→ **Sharon Pickett:**

I'd been 'warned' about the fast pace of MedComms, so in many ways it was what I was expecting, but I don't think I fully appreciated the breadth of topics and projects that MedComms covers. It's been a really interesting journey so far, and I'm really enjoying it.

What is keeping you here?

→ **Shilpa Khobragade:**

I enjoy the dynamic work environment in MedComms, which involves interactions with colleagues and clients from different backgrounds and interests. As a writer, I thoroughly relish the challenge of working on some complex or rare therapy areas which keep me intellectually stimulated.

→ **Kurt Kunz:**

Given my alignment with infectious diseases accounts, my work is often immediately impactful. I work primarily in publications and feel that there is unending variety of work (in terms of material and content) on the cutting edge of research across many therapeutic areas. My colleagues come with rich and diverse backgrounds and interests, as do our clients. In all these ways, I feel there are continual opportunities to learn and grow. The hybrid work environment allowed me to balance and sustain both my family and professional life.

→ **Valarie Leishman:**

My greatest desire in my role is to make the patients feel listened to, understood and valued as people, not simply as patients, and to communicate their story to our clients. I am privileged to be able to work with patients and learn about their journeys and to share their viewpoints and input. I believe that the patient voice can impact what health care providers and pharmaceutical companies do in developing drugs and treating patients. We have the opportunity to bring that patient voice through the many stakeholders in pharma – from R&D to patient services, marketing, sales and even leadership. The patient influence can change care and outcomes such as patient quality of life and perhaps longevity. How fortunate am I to have a part in telling their story?

→ **Sharon Pickett:**

I love being involved in projects that make a difference, especially if you can see something through from initial concept right through to finished product. I'm also constantly learning about new treatments and medical innovations, which is a real interest to me. And the chance to hear from patients about the difference these projects are making to their lives makes it all worthwhile.

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Valarie Leishman
Lead Patient and Professional Stakeholder Services, Guidemark Health

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Kurt Kunz
Medical Project Manager, US Communications