

My First Clinical Research Job

By Norman M. Goldfarb

Rapid growth in the clinical research industry has pulled new employees from a wide variety of positions outside the industry into a wide variety of positions in the industry. To learn where these people come from and where they start in the industry, we surveyed participants at MAGI's Clinical Research Conference in Boston in May, 2019.

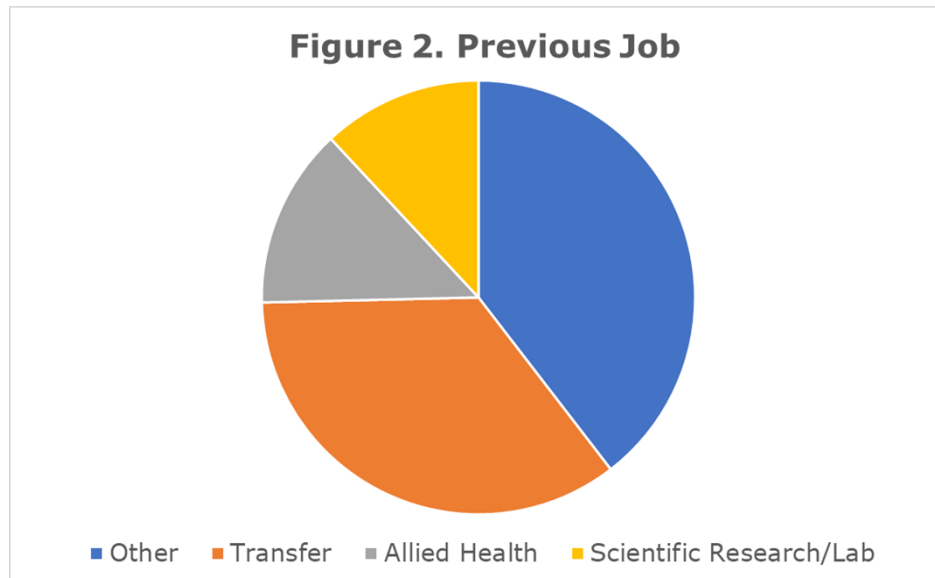
At the conference, 50% of the participants were employed by investigative sites, 21% were employed by study sponsors, 8% were employed by CROs, and 21% were employed by other types of employers (product and service providers, law firms, consultants, government, etc.). About half of the attendees had leadership roles like CEO, vice president, or director. About three-quarters had eight or more years of clinical research experience. Study sponsors were split about 75% biopharma and 25% medical device. Sites were almost evenly split between (a) academic medical centers, (b) health systems and community hospitals, and (c) independent sites and clinics.

Of the 768 participants, 185 (24%) participants answered the first question: What was your first full-time clinical research job? The results are shown in Figure 1:



The first job of 45% of respondents was clinical research coordinator/nurse. None of the other jobs amounted to more than 10% of the total. Job titles varied within categories. Nine percent of respondents started in manager or director positions. Most respondents appear to have started at clinical research sites.

Respondents also answered the second question: What was your last non-clinical research job before that? The results are shown in Figure 2:



Of the 143 respondents who answered both questions, 40% previously had held an unrelated job, 35% had held a similar job outside clinical research, 13% had been allied health professionals, and 12% had held jobs in laboratories or scientific research.

Some of the more interesting previous positions included barista, cashier, teacher, equity analyst, event coordinator, mail clerk, mortgage underwriter, and restaurant manager.

Conclusion

Given the growth in the clinical research industry and the current low unemployment rate in the United States, competition for proven clinical research professionals is fierce. High mobility, especially of clinical research associates at study sponsors and CROs, means many organizations must rapidly replace departing employees before adding new ones to support growth. Study sponsors and CROs often recruit personnel from investigative sites, including sites that are conducting their studies. People often, but not always, join the industry in positions similar to the ones they previously held outside the industry. Many clinical research positions require skills also required outside the industry in apparently unrelated jobs. However, the most common jobs — clinical research coordinator and clinical research associate — are not for everyone.

Author

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