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I. Is a Medical Sales Career the Right Choice for You?

It may seem like an obvious question. After all what’s not to love? Money, flexibility, status...who wouldn’t want a medical sales job? But there is more to a career in medical sales than hob-nobbing with doctors and collecting a fat paycheck. If you are serious about starting a career in medical sales, you should know exactly what you are pursuing.

Your first glimpse into medical and pharmaceutical sales may have been the attractive woman with a suitcase and a box of bagels in the waiting room of your physician’s office. “Who’s she?” you ask. “Oh, just the pharma rep,” the nurse replies, perhaps with a roll of his eyes. You never considered how your physician acquired those free samples he gave you at the last visit, or how he decides to prescribe one drug over the other, but now – upon seeing the pharma rep – it starts to click into place.
Or perhaps you are a nurse in a hospital or a physician’s office. You’ve watched the various pharma and device reps come and go, wearing shoes you could never afford, and you wonder if you could use your medical knowledge to be a successful med rep.

Maybe you have a bit of sales experience, and a friend has suggested that you should think about transitioning into pharmaceutical sales. You ask around – and upon learning about the money and the relative flexibility – you think your friend may be on to something.

But pharmaceutical sales is only one small segment of medical sales. If you hope to build a career in medical sales you need to make an informed decision about:

1) the type of medical sales you want to pursue, and

2) the level of effort it will require to break into (and be successful in) this highly competitive field.
II. What are the different types of medical sales?

The many segments of medical sales can be divided in a variety of ways. Some refer to “capital” and “non-capital” sales, while others say “consumable” and “non-consumable.” The easiest way to think of what constitutes “medical sales” is to consider anything a physician’s office, medical laboratory, or a hospital may need to purchase:

- Computer software (and hardware too)
- Durable equipment including everything from surgical tools to imaging machines to hospital beds to laboratory equipment
- Services such as equipment maintenance, personnel recruitment, or payroll assistance
- Implantable devices including valves, sutures, screws, and anything else that may be inserted into a patient’s body either permanently or temporarily
- Consumables such as laboratory reagents or wound care products as well as medical disposables

Most people new to the industry come into it seeking a job in pharmaceutical sales, but “medical sales” encompasses much more.
Of course, by the above definition, some might exclude pharmaceutical products from the category “medical sales” because a physician does not actually purchase pharmaceuticals from a rep – instead, the products will be prescribed for patients to purchase. But pharmaceutical products must be presented and effectively “sold” to physicians so that they are motivated to write the prescription when necessary; so for our purposes, we will include pharmaceutical sales under the “medical sales” umbrella.

However, because a pharmaceutical rep does not typically generate purchase orders, the income structure may not be as attractive as other medical sales jobs. Additionally, because a pharma rep’s actual effectiveness is near impossible to measure, it can be difficult to transition from pharmaceutical sales into a results-oriented medical sales role.

Is it fair to include pharmaceutical sales under the “Medical Sales” umbrella?
Which type of medical sales career suits your personality?

Your instinct may be to follow the money, but before you start chasing a big money medical equipment or software sales job, you should consider which type of medical sales job is best suited to your personality. A higher average sales price may mean higher commissions, but it usually requires a “killer instinct” to be successful. On the other end of the spectrum, a pharmaceutical sales rep or consumable sales rep requires a different skill set; these reps must be more focused on building relationships and educating providers than closing a sale.
# Medical Sales

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## The “Closer” / “Confidant” Scale

**CLOSER**
Focused on getting the sale

**CONFIDANT**
Focused on building relationships
Are you a “closer” or a “confidant”?

Big ticket items such as EHR software and surgical lasers require a different type of sales person than smaller items such as wound care products or laboratory reagents. High end medical equipment reps and software sales reps must relentlessly pursue the sale. The high dollar products involve more decision makers so these med reps must be confident giving presentations and negotiating terms with C-level executives and other high level administrators, as well as physicians and surgeons.

Because larger purchases are made less frequently than smaller items, these sales reps are likely to move on from a facility once the sale is closed. For this reason, they are less focused on building relationships or “making friends” and are perceived as much more aggressive in their sales techniques than their friendly pharma rep counterpart. Pharma reps and consumable sales reps will call on the same physicians repeatedly, continually refilling orders or reminding them of why their product is better than another. They must develop strong relationships with their physician clients and not be viewed as overly aggressive or intrusive. They seek to be perceived more as a friend or confidant than a sales rep.
Of course, if your personality falls somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, a job in distributor sales or device sales may be for you. These items typically require both a strong selling technique and relationship building skills as they often require ongoing follow up with physicians to refill orders or to demonstrate how to use products.

These are generalizations of course, but it will hopefully get you thinking about your personality and how it might fit with the various types of medical sales jobs.
Which type of medical company should you pursue?

While big names like Medtronic or Merck may be the first to come to mind when you think of medical sales employment options, there are thousands of medical companies that require motivated, hard-working sales reps to move their products. Which one is right for you?

Manufacturers vs. Distributors

Manufacturers develop, produce, and sell their own products while distributors sell products on behalf of manufacturers. Distributors may solely focus on a niche market or they may have a broad catalogue of product offerings.

Fortune 500 vs Startup

Fortune 500 or Fortune 100 companies tend to have formal sales training programs while smaller companies usually hope to hire reps who have already been through a sales training course with a larger company. For this reason, the new grad or entry level candidate may have better luck with a larger company.
Do You Have What It Takes…?

So you’ve done your research and you are confident that medical sales is the right career for you. But do you have what it takes to break into this competitive industry? And more importantly, do you have what it takes to be successful in medical sales?

...To Break Into Medical Sales?

You don't just wake up one morning and go get a job in medical sales. If it were that simple, you wouldn't be reading this ebook! Breaking into this competitive industry takes preparation, strategy, and persistence.
Preparation

If you don’t currently have the sales experience and industry knowledge required by the job description, you will need to invest some time preparing yourself by interviewing or shadowing people in the industry and studying sales techniques.

But even this may not be enough.

The best way to prepare for a career in medical sales is to spend a few years working for a company with a formal sales training program. Once you create a documented history of sales success, you will be a very attractive candidate for medical sales. Of course, a few years selling copiers may not be what you had in mind as prep work, but if you are committed to breaking into the industry, this is a great way to start.

A documented history of business to business sales success is often needed to break into medical sales.
Strategy

Once you identify the type of medical sales you would like to pursue, you should research companies that offer these products or services. Visit their corporate websites to find out more about them; they may even have job openings posted there. Look the company up on LinkedIn to see if you know anyone (or know anyone who knows anyone!) who works for them. Even if you don’t have any connections in common, you can still reach out to corporate recruiters online or by phone – just don’t become a stalker!

You can also research medical sales staffing agencies online. Most agency recruiters have public profiles on LinkedIn. They are usually very open to inquiries from candidates who have done the required prep work and are serious about breaking into the industry.
Niche medical sales job boards can also be critical in finding positions that match your interests. While many of these boards will charge candidates a fee, this is largely done to protect job posters from being overwhelmed with unqualified applications from candidates who have not done their homework. Consider this – if the same medical sales job was posted on Monster, the job poster would receive far more applications than they could ever hope to go through – a majority from people with little to no understanding of medical sales who simply see the salary range and decide to click “apply.”

So while the fee on the niche boards may sting a little (especially if you are unemployed), consider it your entry fee to the relatively small pool of qualified candidates!
Persistence

Once you begin submitting your resume and networking with industry insiders, you will need to develop a system for documenting your activities and follow up. A simple Excel spreadsheet can help you keep track of the companies you are interested in and the names of hiring managers and recruiters that you have emailed, spoken to, or left messages with. You should also keep track of when and where you have submitted your resume so that you will know precisely when to follow up with an email and then a phone call. This will help you stay focused and persistent (without becoming a stalker!). Also note phone interviews, face to face interviews, the date you sent a thank you note (and to whom), as well as any feedback you receive along the way.

A record of your activities will help you stay focused and easily see what steps should come next. If you have done all the follow up you can with your existing list of companies and recruiters, start searching for more to add to your list!
III. Do you have what it takes to be successful in medical sales?

Just because an old college friend is making big money in medical sales – that doesn’t mean it’s easy. The glamorous stereotype of the Barbie®-like med rep treating docs to fancy dinners is a thing of the past! Today, it takes far more brains than beauty to be successful in medical sales. In fact, many reps have science degrees or a background in a medical field.

You should also consider how important the “flexibility” aspect of a medical sales job is to you. While many people associate a medical sales career with setting your own schedule and working from home, this is not always the case. Some device and equipment reps are on call just like doctors and have to be prepared to go into the OR with surgeons in order to assist with their products. Even pharma reps don’t always have the flexibility once associated with the job because many companies are demanding more and more documentation of every detail of a rep’s day. Some companies have been known to place tracking devices on a rep’s car – talk about micromanagement! Your success as a med rep will largely depend on your ability to adapt to the various management styles within the industry.
Medical sales is an incredibly rewarding career path, but it is not without its fair share of challenges. In addition to unwarranted stereotypes and evolving management tactics, the industry is largely affected by changing Federal regulations, as well as economic ups and downs.

It takes extraordinary intelligence, flexibility, and determination to succeed in medical sales. However, if you can manage to break into this competitive field, you will have already demonstrated two qualities essential to your ongoing success: persistence and determination.
Good luck in your job search!

Are you ready to start searching for medical sales jobs? Visit www.MedReps.com today to view the most sought-after positions on the industry’s leading job board.

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IS A MEDICAL SALES CAREER FOR YOU?

Written by Robyn Melhuish
Communications Manager
Healthcare Job Boards

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