

FIND *your* FUTURE

**Name:** Christine Madla

**Job title:** PhD Research Candidate

**Current employer:** UCL School of Pharmacy

**Course studied at UCL:** MSc Pharmaceutical Formulation and Entrepreneurship

**Tell us about your current role and organisation**

I am a PhD Researcher at the UCL School of Pharmacy under the supervision of Professor Abdul Basit in the Basit Research Group. We are a team of 14 PhD candidates and post-doctoral scientists all working towards one vision; translating fundamental science to improve clinical outcomes for patients.

From the group's multi-disciplinary research areas including the three-dimensional (3D) printing of personalised medicines and working towards digital health, my research is invested within the drug delivery arena. My PhD is funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council under the Centre of Doctoral Training Programme which is focused on investigating why males and females respond differently when receiving the same medication.

In addition to my PhD, I actively work as a Medical Writer managing research publications and book chapters spanning modern pharmaceutical manufacturing, gastrointestinal drug delivery and biopharmaceutics.

**What sort of person would this role suit? (i.e. personal skills, qualities and values)**

You are constantly on a rollercoaster during the PhD with experiments often on a downward slope! But that's okay. What you need is the resilience to get back up even when things don't go smoothly and trust that you are still contributing critical knowledge to the field. An equally important quality is to have an inquisitive mind and always be the person to ask why? This is in addition to being a self-starter, having the confidence to direct your own work and to always create or seek new opportunities to progress your research.

A PhD candidate should also be able to effectively communicate both in writing and in person to a range of people in order to apply your hard work into potential industrial or clinical practice.

## **What does a normal working day look like for you?**

The day first starts with a cup of coffee! You then start wearing different hats throughout the day. I could either spend my whole day in the lab working on experiments for my research or be reading and writing for either research publications or reviews. Meetings with my academic and/or industrial supervisor often occur, as well as discussions with focus groups within the field of biopharmaceutics. You also have the opportunity to teach and demonstrate to undergraduate or taught post-graduate classes which I am actively involved in.

## **How did you get to where you are now? (i.e. what are the entry-level roles graduates would apply for to get where you are?)**

I'm very grateful to be in my current position but it is definitely an outcome of previous rejections, hard work and taking every opportunity.

Prior to accepting the opportunity to undertake a PhD, I graduated from the UCL School of Pharmacy with an MSc in Pharmaceutical Formulation and Entrepreneurship as I was particularly interested in the commercial route of translating academic or early drug development research. This was one of the first MSc programmes in the country which harmonised both research and business acumen together, and consequently prepared you to understand a number of areas across the pharmaceutical pipeline that you wouldn't necessarily come across in traditional programmes. This includes workshops on patents, licensing deals, how to fund your start-up and even accounting (in addition to niche pharmaceutical modules, of course).

Although I have taken a research-led role following my MSc, I am still able to apply the entrepreneurial knowledge learnt into my PhD which is actively encouraged in the Doctoral Training Programme I am in.

## **How would you go about getting experience (placements, work experience, internship) in the industry you work in?**

If you're interested in the field of translational research, I encourage those who are still in their undergraduate or early-postgraduate programmes to be active in getting involved with research projects external to what is expected of you. This could be in the form of a summer research intern in a lab, showing keen interest by volunteering in a clinical environment such as a hospital or pharmacy, ERASMUS programmes and generally putting yourself out there and seeking opportunities yourself! Contact your Careers department, make use of current networks and attend relevant events that increase your reach. Take initiative; contact a supervisor that you really want to work with! Or even try contacting their post-doc (they're more likely to reply back as I'm sure the primary supervisor is inundated with emails!). If you're interested in working in industry, I suggest simply looking at the careers or internship section on their websites; they often have summer placements available. Also, utilise LinkedIn – there are a number of untapped opportunities there.

**What are the biggest challenges you face in your work?**

Often feeling like the task at hand is too big to accomplish or the problem is too difficult to solve.

**What's the progression like/where do you see yourself going from here?**

With the skills that I've honed (and am continually developing) in scientific writing, it would be excellent to work in the space of scientific communication or leadership roles in non-profit organisations to improve healthcare systems in developing nations.

**What top tips would you pass on to students interested in this type of work? (i.e. any particular skills, knowledge, experiences, volunteering, extracurricular activities)**

Find what you're good at and specialise in it. If you haven't found your niche yet, be proactive! Take every opportunity that comes your way or better yet, create those opportunities yourself. Show genuine interest and always go the extra mile – especially in areas that you are passionate about. Don't be afraid to talk and network with people (even if they are in a higher role than you) – academics love talking about their research and enjoy disseminating it to those interested.