

## The Evolution of Interim Management

Although a relatively new concept to the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries, the use of Interim Managers is definitely on the increase as more managers understand the possibilities that flexible resourcing brings to their organisation - and not just to provide temporary cover for permanent members of staff. There are many more strategic roles where Interim Managers can provide skills and experience not available in-house, particularly during times of rapid growth, change management or crisis management.

Over the last 2 or 3 decades, interim management has evolved and is recognised today as one of the fastest growing segments of the manpower market – so what has driven this rapid growth? Throughout the 1970s/80s, the pharmaceutical industry expanded swiftly, fuelled by exciting new medicines. Career planning tended to follow a “job for life” philosophy within the rapidly growing companies. Only ambitious individuals, who were impatient to move upward, opportunistically made career moves. Employers covered skills shortages by internal secondments and gaps left by resignations were generally “fudged” until replacements could be hired.

Increasing mobility and M&A impacts have changed this previously stable situation forever. “Integration”, “Downsizing”, “Right-sizing”, and “Business Transformation” mean that the cosy assurances of previous years are things of the past. Companies are considering alternative resourcing strategies and employers are now able to determine staffing needs much more on an ad-hoc basis with core competencies supplemented by skills and experience from outside the firm.

Some executives have found a whole new career as a result. These are today’s “Interim Managers”. Individuals who have chosen to spend their life as independent agents, willing to go wherever they are needed, on call, for as long or as short a time as an employer wishes.

### Employer’s Perceptions

The extent to which interim solutions are a key part of today’s business strategy for the pharmaceutical industry has been confirmed in a recent survey of senior managers from pharmaceutical and biotechnology firms.

The survey (commissioned by RSA Interims) collected information on the experiences and perceptions of employers of Interim Managers (IMs). 29 of the survey respondents were CEOs or Main Board Directors, the remainder being senior managers covering the full functional spectrum (including pharmaceutical physicians). The key findings of the survey were:

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- the functional scope for Interim Management is wide covering most areas from R&D all the way through to Sales & Marketing
- the main perceived benefits of Interim Managers are flexibility, fast learning curve, independence and objectivity
- cost effectiveness appears to be beyond doubt with over half of respondents describing their experience of Interim Managers as good value for money
- the main reasons for using Interim Managers are short-term cover for a permanent employee and the importing of skills and experience that are not available in-house
- the most common perceived risk for first time users of Interim Managers is their ability to fit in with established staff

Immediate effectiveness and lack of need for supervision, coupled with independence of thought and breadth of experience are all attractive to resource-starved line managers faced with an immediate problem. The independence and objectivity of an IM is an asset that should not be underestimated. Challenges to the status quo can be uncomfortable for incumbent team members, but an IM is ideally placed to ask the most awkward questions. As one sponsor put it: "An effective mechanism to allow short-term critical management issues to be dealt with without disrupting (current) management structure."

### **Interim Management and Pharmaceutical Physicians**

Pharmaceutical Physicians represent a key area for Interim Management activities in the industry, undertaking assignments across all aspects of medical work. This can range from simply filling a resource gap or providing medical sign-off services to providing highly specialized strategic support for the business. This strategic capability is often the least understood side of interim management but it can be tremendously valuable to clients who understand how it may be used. As an example the case study given below illustrates how one company found real value by using an Interim Manager. One of the most fascinating results emerging from this and many other examples is the fact that, in almost every case, a significant "bonus" emerges in the months after the project is concluded. This is in the form of benefits that come out of the exercise but were not planned or foreseen when the project was initiated.

### **Case Study**

How an Interim Pharmaceutical Physician played a key role in assisting a company in its product development strategy.

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**The issue:** A mid-sized Pharmaceutical Company had a need to make evaluations in a new therapeutic area in which it had very little expertise. The Company was presented with an opportunity to develop a promising early stage product in a new therapeutic area but didn't have the expertise to make a detailed evaluation on whether it should invest in further development.

**The answer:** An Interim Senior Medical Specialist with the relevant therapeutic expertise was identified within days and appointed to set up and evaluate some initial trials. Although the appointee was highly skilled and experienced the Company didn't need him full time so he worked on a three day/week basis, which suited him very well because he had other clients he was also working with.

**The outcome:** Over a six-month period the company was able to run a series of trials, develop a business plan and make informed recommendations on whether to invest in the permanent resources they would need to pursue this. Armed with the data the board took the decision to move forward and started to hire the necessary permanent resources for the future. As the new people came on board and the interim started to reduce his involvement and was able to effect a smooth transition for the company.

**The bonus:** During his period with the company the Interim Specialist, as part of his work, had used his strong relationships with key global opinion leaders in this therapeutic area. When he left he was able to transfer these relationships to the company, which had previously had no relationships in this area. The product was moved forward into development and these contacts proved to be most valuable.

#### **A career as an Interim Pharmaceutical Physician**

In this case study the focus was, quite rightly, on the client's needs and how they solved their problem. But what about the Interim Manager involved? What did he get out of it other than, obviously, being paid for his work? Well the truth is that he got a tremendous amount of job satisfaction because he was able to use his skills and experience in taking on some leading edge work and helping the company in the way described. Even for less challenging assignments Interims are usually engaged when a client has a problem of some kind, so if you are the kind of person who gains satisfaction from challenges or change you are likely to enjoy the jobs you take on. If you are not that kind of person then Interim Management is probably not for you.

Other reasons why people become Interim Managers often involve lifestyle choices. Working independently you have much more control over your working

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life and of course you can choose the work you undertake. This quality of life improvement has become particularly attractive to many people who are in the middle of their working life. So, whereas a few years ago Interim Managers would tend to be in the 50-60 age range, today the average age is probably around the early forties.

So what are the characteristics of a successful interim manager? The following list is not exhaustive but some of attributes which come to mind are:

- committed experienced professionals
- team worker
- passion, energy and enthusiasm
- flexibility and adaptability
- non political but politically astute
- task orientated
- enjoy change and can manage it
- able to lead, manage and motivate by influence
- open-minded

### Summary

The industry is still learning the benefits of using Interim Managers but it is clear that the use of Interim Management is on the increase. A significant number of Pharmaceutical Physicians are now developing a career in this area and our experience shows that every month more and more are thinking of it. It is not for everyone but if you possess some of the characteristics listed above and want to take more control of your working life perhaps you should consider it.

From a client's perspective, once managers have used an Interim Manager the benefits truly become clear. As one CEO responding to the survey put it: "In my experience Interim Managers are motivated and highly experienced, providing very cost-effective and committed resource".

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