

Editorial

Is there a Future for Organic Chemists in the Pharmaceutical Industry outside China and India?

These days I seem to be getting a lot of e-mails from former colleagues who are, or are soon to be, out of a job. The impending closure of GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) sites in the UK and Italy, and the announcement by Astra Zeneca of the closure of the Loughborough (Charnwood) site with the loss of 1200 R&D staff along with the loss of jobs at the Avonmouth manufacturing site mean that many scientists in process R&D in the UK are falling on hard times. At the same time, Pfizer has cut staff in Medicinal Chemistry and Process R&D at Sandwich, UK, after the merger with Wyeth and has reduced the number of manufacturing sites in Ireland and elsewhere. So in the UK, the three major companies carrying out medicinal chemistry and process R&D are all reducing staffing levels. Now, where do those out of work, or for that matter new recruits from universities, find jobs? I wish I knew the answer!

My advice to my out-of-work friends is to look at emerging pharma companies who are only now moving their compounds into development and at contract research organizations (CROs), some of whom still seem to be expanding in Europe as well as in India and China, and even more widely in the nonpharma chemical industry. Of course, it is in Asia where most of the job vacancies are, and one or two courageous Brits have made the move out there and are enjoying life in a new country. Also, privately owned European pharma companies, freed from the merger-mania which is destroying the industry, seem to be doing reasonably well despite the recession.

In the United States I am sure the situation is no better with many major multinationals announcing layoffs in the last year, and even the biotech sector is not immune to similar problems. In contrast, there are few jobs openly advertised in the chemical press, presumably since most vacancies can be filled by finding suitable candidates through networking. Placing an ad may result in thousands of applications with the associated expense of sorting out appropriate candidates to interview; thus, few companies are using this method of recruitment. For the job hunter, networking is also clearly the best way to find out about new opportunities.

Thus, for many out-of-work chemists, a career change seems the only option, possibly even a move out of chemistry altogether, but what a waste this is! Years and years of training and on-the-job experience which could be used in the chemical/pharmaceutical industry are being donated to another discipline, hopefully a scientific one.

The only good news on this topic is that, as chemists seek to improve their CVs, they are realising that more publications make them more attractive to employers. As a result, they are urgently writing up their work and submitting papers to *Organic Process Research & Development* (OPRD). This is great for OPRD, but I'm hoping this will also result in positive outcomes for the job hunters.

I wish good luck to all those looking for work in the next few months; there are jobs around, but you have to be in the know to find them, so **keep networking!**

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