

Overview of Pharmaceutical Sales Jobs

Prescription Drugs
Pharmaceutical sales jobs can be divided into a few different sectors. The most important sector will be prescription drugs where most of the action will be. This is by far where the majority of pharmaceutical sales reps work in with the main target customer base being physicians. Depending on the type of drugs promoted, sales forces target family physicians and/or specialist doctors as their main customers. Some giant pharmaceutical companies like Glaxo and Merck have large numbers of promoted products requiring several sales force divisions within each firm. There can be separate divisions promoting completely different products to the same or different customer groups. Sometimes different divisions can have the same products but they have different groups of target customers to focus on. Each pharmaceutical rep might be promoting an average of three different main drugs with a few secondary products as well. New drugs usually only have a certain number of years before their patents run out. Drugs that have been successful in the market will likely attract generic competitors in time. Therefore, sales forces will usually spend most of their efforts on newer drugs hoping to generate as much sales as possible before patent protections run out. Once cheaper generic versions show up in the market, sales forces usually switch their focuses to other newer drugs that still have patent protection. It is usually too difficult to compete against low cost generic products so brand name companies tend to promote only those products that have no generic competition. There are also smaller companies that focus on niche specialty drugs. The sales forces for these companies will probably focus more on specific medical specialties as target customers rather than on general practice doctors. Remember that the number of family physicians outnumber any single medical specialty group by far so large companies which promote to general practice doctors will require large sales forces. In contrast, companies that promote only to specific medical niches can get away with much smaller sales forces due to the smaller number of target customers. An example would be a cancer or oncology drug which will usually never be prescribed by a family physician anyway. Sales positions in these specialty companies tend to be a bit more difficult to get for candidates who are new to the industry as experienced pharmaceutical representatives are usually preferred. Selling to specialists is often regarded as an advanced level of pharmaceutical sales more suited to those who have been in the industry for awhile. However, there have been exceptions, especially with dermatology companies promoting skin products.

Over-the-Counter Products
Many companies have over-the-counter (OTC) products such as cough and cold medications which are non-prescription drugs which represent another main sector. Larger companies who have both prescription and OTC products may have separate sales forces for each sector. Some companies may be strictly OTC focused. In general, sales positions for OTC lines may be a bit easier to get compared to prescription sales for new candidates. This is because in most cases, OTC products are less technical than prescription drugs and are considered to be a lower level of pharmaceutical selling. Sales forces selling just OTC products will likely be calling on only family physicians rather than specialists as target customers. There may be more calls to retail pharmacists too since these health professionals are often consulted by patients in regards to product selections (for example, customers asking a pharmacist to recommend a brand of cough syrup). In all likelihood, the salaries for OTC sales reps will be lower than for their prescription drug counterparts since in general OTC products cost less than prescription drugs. There have been cases where new pharmaceutical representatives got their start in OTC sales and then moved on to prescription sales after a few years of experience in the industry. So OTC sales would be an option for new candidates as a possible industry entry point.

Generic Drug Products
The generic drug companies represent another kettle of fish altogether. Since they usually market product equivalents to brand name drugs that are already successful and well known, sales forces with generic companies generally do not call on physicians at all. Instead, they would concentrate on pharmacies, both retail and hospital based. Pricing alone is usually the main selling factor. This sector is therefore a very different type of pharmaceutical sales job and is actually quite unrelated in regards to the type of work that pharmaceutical sales reps from brand name companies do. In fact, some brand name or ethical companies as they are sometimes referred to, feel so much animosity towards generics that work experience with generic firms may actually end up being a negative point in a candidate's resume. So if your goal is still in the direction of the brand name pharmaceutical companies where physicians are the main target customers, you would be well advised to stay clear of the generic companies unless you are willing to spend your entire pharmaceutical sales career in generics.

About the Author

Soares was in Florida on Tuesday for raids conducted by federal and state agents at two Signature Pharmacy stores. Four company officials, including,

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