

Q & A with Zophia Lim

## Pharmaceutical Industry

*In this issue, we are featuring our NGS alumnus Dr. Zophia Lim. After graduating from NGS, she worked as a research fellow in A\* STAR for a few years. Then she started her career in the pharmaceutical industry. Currently, she is working as a senior medical advisor in a pharmaceutical company. She shares with us her experience on how she switches from academia to industry.*



### 1. Could you briefly introduce yourself?

My name is Zophia and I love my part in bringing much needed medications to patients so that they can feel better and live longer. I have always been passionate about science and helping people. My journey started when I ran an Electron Microscopy unit 15 years ago. After my Masters, I thought that gaining some research experience and publications prior to application to PhD Scholarship would greatly increase my chance of success. So I worked for another few years before graduating with a NGS PhD under the A\*STAR Graduate Scholarship (AGS). Thereafter, I completed my post-doc in Tissue Engineering at A\*STAR in 2018. After more than a decade at the bench, I decided to venture out into the Industry and started my 2nd career in Medical Affairs.

### 2. Could you share what are you currently doing? How has the NGS PhD experience equipped you to perform your role?

I am currently a Senior Medical Advisor in a big pharma and my job involves understanding and talking about the science of medicines to various stakeholders with the goal of driving a positive impact for patients

and healthcare professionals (HCPs). Let me break it down. Innovation in medical sciences is advancing at an incredibly furious pace and there is so much knowledge and information available. Good science is only beneficial to human health when it is readily available to HCPs who can then make informed decisions for their patients. Medical Affairs is therefore the bridge between the R&D part of the organization and the HCPs. With my NGS PhD experience, I have in-depth scientific know-how and a clear understanding of the application of science to improve health. The interdisciplinary approach and the emphasis on communication at NGS prepared me for the way I now work with my stakeholders.

### 3. What do you think is the difference between research work and industry job? Did you face any challenge when you make the switch?

There are many differences between academia and industry so I will discuss one that has been important in my journey: the level of science and understanding is vastly different. In research, we are at the forefront of our chosen area of study and know the topics in depth. We talk to fellow scientists in jargons and language that only we

know. In industry, I must clearly articulate clinical value to other stakeholders, e.g., Regulatory, Commercial, Market Access, in terms that are easily understood. I learned that when I communicate with passion for the patients, trust is built.

Initially, I had a hard time transiting from academia to industry. Everything was different, especially the way people engage and interact was foreign to me. Also, I missed the lab tremendously – holding a pipette, the smell of the lab, the way I used to think about a problem and how to solve it, etc. After about 6 months, I started to settle in and felt like I was contributing to the organization and making an impact on patients' lives.

### 4. Do you have other things to share with our NGS alumni?

Looking back, I had a very narrow outlook on what a PhD would equip me with. I thought I would spend the rest of my career at the bench and that I would not venture into the 'real' world. I am so glad that I did because I love my 2nd career. I love the value that my work brings to patients in need. So, keep an open mind and speak to people about what they do. You will never know what exciting opportunity lies around the corner.