

Flexible Resourcing: the perfect solution in challenging times

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The global financial crisis, increasing cost pressures and the constant need to reduce overheads means there's never been a better time to harness the benefits of using interim expertise. In the pharmaceutical industry, all indications are that ongoing restructuring and outsourcing are set to continue over the next few years. In addition, pressure on public spending will inevitably ripple into healthcare cost containment.

To navigate these uncertain times, all major global players in the sector are using interim specialists for a wide range of reasons.

There's the benefit of tapping into highly specialist areas as and when you need them - and quickly too. Interim help can cover unforeseen events, both good and bad. A key person may unexpectedly fall ill and have to take time off just as an important project is coming to a head. Recruitment of permanent staff can take six months from the initial decision until they actually start work, whereas an interim could be onsite within days or certainly weeks. Once on board, interims tend to hit the ground running by virtue of their experience.

Unthawing the freeze

In the current climate, there may be a need to freeze - or reduce - headcount. As a result critical skill gaps can suddenly emerge within a team. Anticipating these problems early on and covering them quickly by parachuting in interim support offers a quick solution.

Interim expertise can also be used in more positive circumstances, perhaps to seize an exciting new business opportunity, to meet tight project deadlines which would be out of the question without additional skilled help or to cover essential knowledge gaps.

In these circumstances, the alternative of recruiting for a permanent specialist to fill this gap is not even an option in terms of time and in any case full-time assistance may well not be needed beyond the life of the project.

Cost control

One of the main reasons why companies use interims is of course cost and the control of overheads. By only paying for what you use, you can control the level of input and therefore the cost. It avoids increasing the corporate overhead on projects with uncertain outcomes, such as clinical research programmes in new indications.

What you save by using an interim?

At first sight interim daily rates may seem high but salary alone isn't the end of the story. To make a fair comparison you need to take the whole package into account, including company car or car allowance, company pension scheme and private healthcare. That doesn't include the compulsory National Insurance that the employer has to pay and any other perks.

This also excludes additional benefits offered to permanent employees, which are more difficult to quantify in



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general terms such as bonuses, share options, childcare vouchers, maternity and paternity leave, subsidised meals and other initiatives such as employee assistance programmes. It also doesn't take into account costs associated

with recruitment which would include any fees payable to the selected recruitment partner, as well as internal overheads associated with the recruitment process.

So how would this compare to using an interim manager to cover the same role?

'Win-win' on focused effort

A key factor in the calculation is that in the vast majority of cases (currently around 70%), clients only use an interim specialist for three days per week, as opposed to five days a week for permanent staff if covering a full-time role. This is because they find that interims can effectively cover the workload in a reduced time because they are unhindered by having to attend internal or external meetings, staff or management issues, conferences or even becoming involved in office politics. As a result the time spent is solely focused on the project in hand and therefore highly productive and cost-effective.

This benefit is echoed by interims themselves who enjoy being able to get on with the task without having to get involved in 'administrative overhead' of running a department. As one Interim Pharmacovigilance Executive/Scientist says: "One of the key advantages of working as an interim for me is not having to get involved in budgeting, staff management or general office politics."

Flexible staffing

Putting the direct cost issues to one

side, another key benefit of using interims in these cost-conscious times is that you can exert control over the resource and end the interim assignment with one month's notice if the project is called to a halt for instance. This compares with severance payments, to say nothing of outplacement coaching and services for which you would be liable in the case of a permanent employee.

Taking everything into account, interims can offer significant benefits in terms of cost and control of overheads. Accessing the right expertise at the right time is also important and by working through an established interim provider, this can be achieved.

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