"An eye-opening and interesting experience..."

Bio-economy Career Profile

Position: Clinical Research Assistant

Name: Karen Waller

Company: Global IQ

Salary Range: $30,000 to $50,000 per year

What I do:

I work with pharmaceutical companies investigating new drugs and assisting with project management to ensure investigational studies are conducted according to federal regulations and international Good Clinical Practice (ICH GCP).

As a Clinical Research Assistant at Global IQ, I am mostly responsible for document management on a daily basis. Global IQ is a Contract Research Organization (CRO) that is contracted by pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies to carry out clinical research studies. To ensure that the studies are carried out safely and effectively, I am in contact with clinical sites about studies they are working on. My role within the project management team is to handle and process essential documents for clinical research studies. Sometimes that means one study or sometimes that means multiple studies at one time. The studies can range anywhere from 20 to 1,500 people and vary from one month to several years.

What education and skills do candidates need for this position?

You should definitely have a degree in science, of which medically related sciences are most applicable.
I have a Bachelor of Science degree with a specialization in pharmacology.

The Clinical Research Assistant, also referred to as a Junior Clinical Research Associate or Document Specialist, is often an entry-level position, so certifications are generally not required, but are definitely useful.

As a Clinical Research Assistant, you assist Clinical Research Associates as they monitor at clinical sites, which provides some of the experience required to gain the certification. You need an auditor's mindset, where attention to detail is a must. Because the clinical research industry is governed by strict regulations, the documentation that I review must be correct in every detail. You need to be someone who thrives in making sure processes are followed to a "T," otherwise the data could be seriously compromised along with the safety of the research subjects. Fastidiousness is definitely a character trait of a good research assistant.

You need to enjoy working with documentation and regulations but also working with people. Only if you have good people skills can you make this process work.

What are the best parts of your job?

I find it thrilling to be on the inside of the pharmaceutical and clinical research industries. Most people don't think of the difficult process leading up to approval of an investigational drug when they visit their local pharmacy. I experience the complexities of the drug development industry every day in my work. It's fascinating to watch all the different aspects of drug development come together to produce a marketable drug. It's been an eye-opening and interesting experience.

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