

Becoming a Medical Science Liaison

What is a Medical Science Liaison (MSL):

Medical Science Liaisons provide an important connection between product development and the healthcare industry. They typically work for pharmaceutical or biotech companies, and their job is to stay informed on the latest developments in research and clinical trials and share this information with physicians and healthcare professionals (KOLs).

Medical Science Liaisons work closely with researchers, pharmaceutical product teams, and medical professionals. It's important to maintain an extensive network of strong contacts to be successful in this position.

Additional Titles for an MSL:

- Medical Liaison
- Clinical Liaison
- Medical Scientific Liaison
- Clinical Science Manager
- Medical Science Manager
- Medical Scientific Manager
- Regional Scientific Manager
- Regional Medical Scientist
- Regional Medical Liaison
- Regional Scientific Liaison
- National Medical Scientist
- Medical Information Scientist
- Scientific Affairs Liaison
- Medical Affairs Liaison
- Medical Research Scientist
- Professional Education Liaison

Transitioning into Pharma:

It's important to set yourself with the right background up to become an MSL. If you are struggling to break into the industry, the following are some great positions that could help you in making the transition:

- Fellowships
- Research Backgrounds
- Sales Experience
- Regulatory
- Consulting
- Medical Communications
- Scientific Advisor

MSL Essentials:

Flexibility

You must have the ability to travel. Depending on the company or MSL team, travel typically varies between 40-60%. Keep in mind that travel is anytime you leave your front door, including local KOL visits. You must also be flexible to relocate, if needed. Being open to relocation can open the door to more opportunities, and might even give you the advantage over other entry-level candidates.

Communication Skills

MSLs communicate with people all day, every day. A few key attributes of a successful MSL are being comfortable in front of others, the ability to initiate and carry a conversation, and the ability to convey scientific information. MSLs must be able to communicate effectively and relay complex information in a very clear and concise manner. MSLs constantly work on their storytelling skills to communicate their company's information to KOLs in a more relatable manner.

Personality / EQ

MSLs need to have situational awareness and the ability to read people. Adapting to your KOL's personality can help you steer the conversation in the right direction. A good MSL will research their KOL beforehand or use observation skills to take notice of photos and personal items around their office to find crucial points of common interest that will help build a strong relationship. Another quality all MSLs must have is a keen awareness for when a KOL is short on time, distracted, or losing interest in the conversation, as they must be able to pivot the conversation and adapt their delivery to ensure a successful meeting.

Scientific Acumen

MSLs are intelligent, sharp, and up-to-date on emerging science. They are experts in their disease space, or the spaces their company is supporting. This also means knowing the competitive landscape, and being able to support that knowledge to their KOLs with facts and data.

Time Management / Organizational Skills

When an MSL is in the field, they are in charge of making their own appointments with KOLs and arranging their own travel. The pace is fast and the employer has expectations that must be met, so MSLs must be extremely organized and manage their time well.

Collaborative / Team Player

Most companies we work with value MSLs who are scientifically driven and hard-working, but just as important is being a team player. In this position, there is constant collaboration with other MSLs on your team or with other colleagues within your organization, so MSLs must be team players, and be able to work collaboratively with these counterparts.

How to Get Started:

Connect with a Recruiter

Recruiters act as a intermediary between MSL candidates and the positions with pharma companies. We have established relationships with our client companies and hiring managers, and can give you the insight you need to have a successful interview process. It's important for you to interview your recruiters. There are 2 kinds of recruiters out there:

- “Shotgun Recruiters” will get the bare minimum from you. They'll have you fill out an 'About Me' form and submit your resume for every position they have in your area, regardless of whether it's a fit for your experience and interests.
- Dedicated and trusted recruiters like you'll find at SEMbio prefer to get to know you as a person, what motivates and excites you, and truly understand your scientific background. Our goal is to find a position that excites you, where you are passionate about the science and proud to go to work for the company.

It's a great idea to find 2-3 recruiters that you know and trust. Make sure there is always an open line of communication between yourself and your recruiters.

Make Connections

Connect with MSLs you already know, and get connected with MSLs you'd like to know. Your connections already in the MSL role can tell you firsthand the good, the bad, and the ugly of Medical Affairs. Reach out to MSLs working in small pharma, large pharma, diagnostics, etc to better understand what type of MSL role you would be most interested in for your career.

Research

Find and research companies that interest you. Find MSLs or KOLs in your area to connect with. Mention companies of interest to your recruiter - if you find a company they don't work with, maybe they can contact the company about working on their positions or work to get your resume into the right hands at the company.

Conferences

Be aware of conferences happening in your area. These are great for networking with MSLs, gaining additional insight into a therapeutic, or just gaining knowledge that you can utilize while interviewing.

Interview Process:

Phone Interview

This stage of the interview process might be one interview, or could consist of several phone screens. These interviews could be with the hiring manager, HR, other MSLs on the team, or all of the above.

Face to Face Interview

Face to face (or final) interviews at one time were conducted at company headquarters. However, since 2020 the majority of these interviews are virtual. A handful of companies have returned to interviewing candidates in-person at headquarters, but it's seen less frequently. Face to face interviews can also occasionally be conducted at an airport hotel, another location offsite, or by meeting while at a mutually attended conference.

The majority of final interviews require a presentation, although not all do. Presentations are typically around 15-20 minutes followed by a Q&A. The expectations will be delivered by either the company or your recruiter, but typical options include presenting on a topic of your choice, or presenting on a company-provided publication or presentation. Preferences vary from company to company.

Offer Letter

If the company chooses to make an offer after you've completed the final interview, they might request references to begin a reference check and then call with a verbal offer. Many times the company will require a verbal acceptance from you before sending a written offer.

Acceptance

Once you have verbally accepted the offer, the company will send a written offer letter, usually within 1-2 days. Once the offer letter is signed and returned to the company, you have an official acceptance!

What to Expect in an Offer:

Start Date

Typically your start date will allow time to give your current employer a 2-week notice. There may be circumstances where you're able to start sooner or need a later start date, and in those instances you can coordinate with your recruiter, or with the person at the company delivering your offer.

Base

Entry-level MSLs without prior experience can expect a base salary of \$160 – 180k. Ultimately this number is dependent on several factors, including your expertise, clinical experience, the size of the company, how well you interviewed, etc. The goal of each company is to put their best foot forward with your offer.

Bonus

The majority of companies we work with have a bonus structure set between 10-30% of your base salary, and this amount is paid out annually.

Sign-On Bonus

*****A sign-on bonus is not typical for a first time MSL.*** Sign-on bonuses are most commonly delivered to MSLs who would be leaving a bonus or other unvested money behind at their current position. A sign-on bonus is offered to offset that money that would be "left on the table" by leaving their current company to join a new company.

Car/Car Allowance

Most companies offer their MSLs either a fleet vehicle, a car allowance, or mileage reimbursement for the MSL's own vehicle. The options vary from company to company.

Stock Options

Some companies are not publically traded or do not offer a 401K and usually those companies usually have other LTI's or long term incentives to make up for that

410K

Healthcare

Vacation

How Can a Recruiter Help:

Review Your Background

At SEMbio, we have the same process with every candidate. The first thing we ask for is your resume, so we can review your background before our scheduled conversation. Our intent is to learn about your experience, your therapeutic preference, your timeline for starting a new position, and your compensation expectations. We document these details in our database for expedited matching when positions with our clients become available.

Revising Resumes / CVs

We are available to help you revise or update your resume, and happy to do so! We are also available to offer any advice we feel would help you during the interview process, from our decades of combined industry experience working alongside companies and hiring managers.

Job Matching

Our streamlined process allows us to take the information we've learned from you and create tags in our database that will ensure that your name comes up in our recruiters' searches as positions become available that match your experience and preferences.

Submission

Our submission process included sending your resume along with a short summary, written by your recruiter, stating your experience relevant to the position, your timeline, your soft skills, communication skills, compensation expectations, etc. This information goes directly to the hands of the hiring manager as a vetted prospect for their position.

Phone Screen / Face to Face Prep

Before each interview, your SEMbio recruiter will schedule a 3-person conference call with both of you and also the SEMbio account manager working directly with the client. These are strategy sessions for you as you prepare for each interview. We'll discuss your interviewer, the questions they typically ask, questions you might have for them, and ultimately help you feel completely prepared to put your best foot forward.

Presentation and Thank You Note Reviews

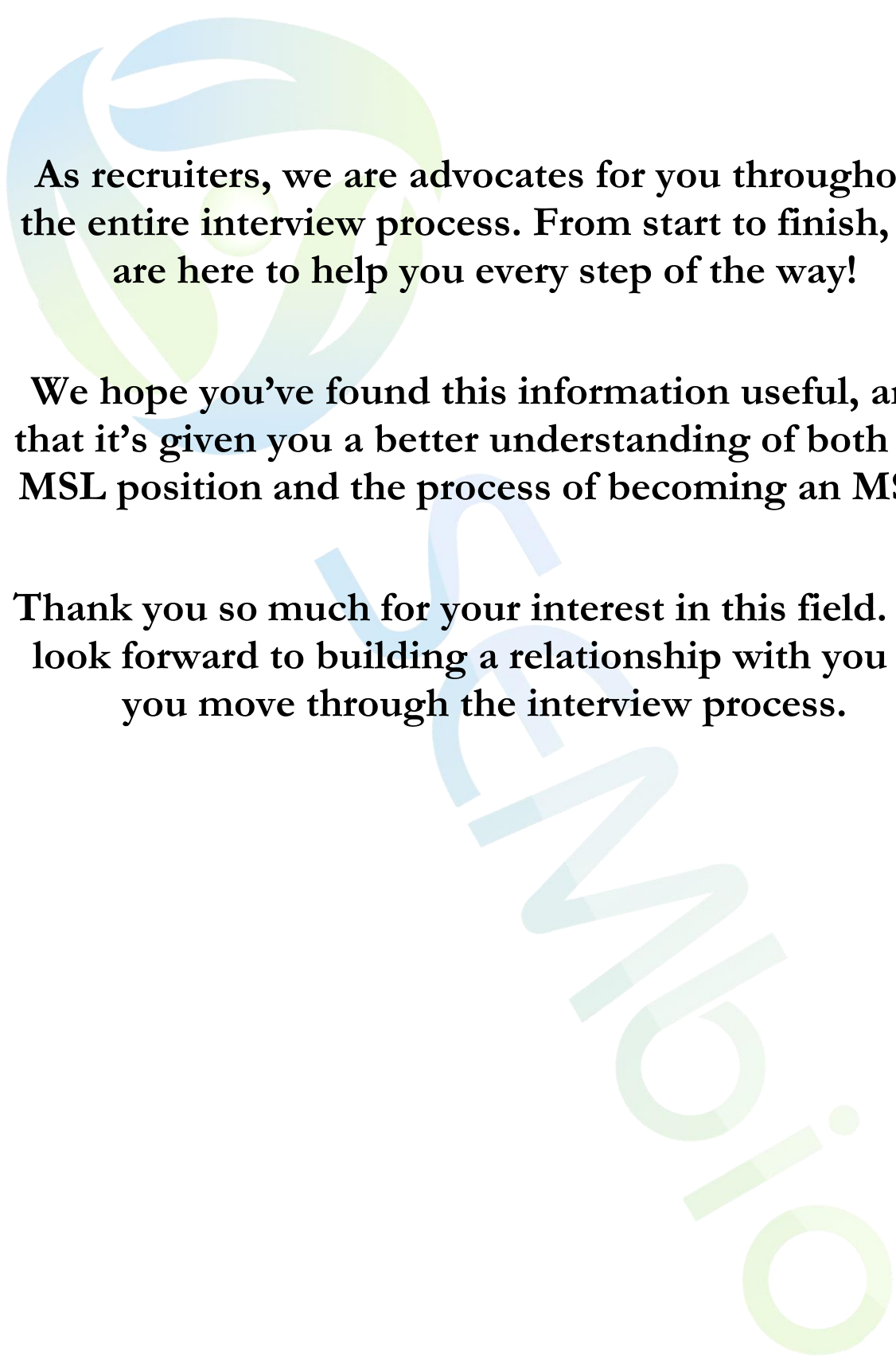
For thank you notes and presentations, we're available to be a second set of eyes. Grammar and spelling errors are more common than you think, even from the sharpest of candidates. We will always ask to review thank you notes before they're sent, or presentations before your final interview, so please utilize this service as a "fail safe" in your interview process!

Salary Negotiations

Our job is to make sure you get the best possible offer, and one you're excited to accept. Discussions about money in an interview process can be uncomfortable, but through open and honest conversations with your recruiter, we can take care of that for you.

Resignation Process

At SEMbio we have everything you'll need to make a smooth transition. We're here to help with sample resignation letters, and can be a source of information on what to expect when you resign.



As recruiters, we are advocates for you throughout the entire interview process. From start to finish, we are here to help you every step of the way!

We hope you've found this information useful, and that it's given you a better understanding of both the MSL position and the process of becoming an MSL.

Thank you so much for your interest in this field. We look forward to building a relationship with you as you move through the interview process.