

Woman in science: How fortunate do you feel?

It is a well-known fact that women in science were rarely acknowledged or credited for their work before the 1970s. Much of what we hear or read suggests that in the 21st century this situation has changed. Yet here and now, "Women in science are a rare breed. In the biopharma field not only do they often make less than their male colleagues, they often rarely receive any recognition".

Under-promoted, under-paid and under-recognised... this was uncomfortable reading. We should remind ourselves that much progress has been made over the past 50 years. We are frequently surrounded by inspirational women who have shattered the 'glass ceiling' and don't let gender bias stand in their way, but do the stories about these wonderful, successful women lull us into a false sense that we are winning the good fight?

We turned to three women who work in the biopharma industry to obtain some honest insights about what it means to be working in our industry in the 21st century.

Chiara Gallotti of Cerbios-Pharma SA give some illuminating answers to our questions. Based in Switzerland, her employer is a highly qualified CDMO, engaged in cGMP development of APIs, HAPIs, ADCs and biologics.

Q: What has been your greatest accomplishment?

A: My greatest success was that I managed to find a good

balance between my private and professional life. I am the mother of a boy and a girl who are about to start their university careers. I have always tried to be there and to be a safe point of reference for them. When my children were younger, I took the opportunity to work part-time, which helped me a lot. Nevertheless, I have always worked with passion and determination, sometimes with some sacrifice, but I have always given my best in my work and for everything I have dedicated to the companies I have worked for.

However, the right balance has allowed me to find great personal satisfaction in both my private and professional life. Being close to everything surrounding the growth of my children has made me organised, determined, helpful and empathetic. These characteristics have also served me well at a professional level. At work, kindness and respect, together with determination, are the right mix to drive a good team and good relationships with colleagues. It seems easy, but in reality it is not so simple, as for everyone. There are so many difficulties in everyday life and things

often do not go as we want, but we should definitely never give up, even at work.

Q: What types of skills do women in the pharmaceutical industry need to develop?

A: Firstly, a scientific background is mandatory to cover most of the possible figures in a pharmaceutical company. An important quality is the willingness to embrace change, accept it and work together to move forward. It doesn't matter what your role is in the company, but resistance to any kind of change can become an obstacle for the whole team. Working in the pharmaceutical industry means travelling on a very fast train, so it is important to not only have scientific competence and to be a specialist in a scientific sector, but since the pharma world is continuously growing and evolving, people have to collaborate, work in a team, co-ordinate with others, solve complex problems and manage projects to achieve a common objective.

By training I am a chemist and after university I first worked as a synthesis chemist to optimise production processes and then in medicinal chemistry at pharmaceutical companies. Here, I began to understand what is behind

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the development of a drug, the enormous effort that is made, both personally and economically, to bring a product to market that is useful to people. The fact of contributing, even in a small way, to the development of a drug that improves someone's life or relieves their pain motivated me. I know this very well as my brother suffers from a rare disease for which there is no solution and I am personally very committed in new and experimental treatments. Pharmaceutical companies that invest in new drugs are the future for all of us.

When I decided to work in Quality Assurance, I was proud and happy because I knew that my contribution would become more and more important. I have been working in Quality Assurance for many years, my scientific preparation and my practical experiences in production plants and laboratories gave me the basis to be concrete and to talk the same language with other departments. Since it is my daily duty, quality is the most important thing in a pharmaceutical company in order to distribute products according to international laws, but above all patient safety must always be guaranteed. For this reason, the quality assurance department has a great ethical responsibility, not only a commercial one. Intellectual honesty is one of the top qualities, as well as problem-solving and decision-making skills. It is important to be able to liaise with the authorities and to have a good knowledge of the international quality standards, norms and guidelines.

Cerbios-Pharma has relied on me for all my competences and the person I am; I want to demonstrate every day that they have made a good choice.

Q: Have you faced any obstacles that were directly related to being a woman?

A: I think I have always been lucky in the companies I have known. I have always had respect for everyone and I have received it in return. The pharmaceutical world is more innovative than other sectors for women; I know very competent women who hold very important positions and have the full support of the company they work for. However, in my professional career, due to a different culture or for pure sexism, I have not always been fully accepted or have received embarrassing looks, but it happened on very few occasions at specific events.

Women in leadership positions, not just in pharma, have to demonstrate their talent and competence, perhaps more than men, although women – often having typically feminine sensitivity – make them not only good department heads, but also good leaders. A good leader has a good team made up of human resources not workers. A good leader must know how to trust her collaborators by offering them professional opportunities and always treating both men and women with respect. When you identify someone in a team wants to advance their career, you should recognise and value him or her.



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