Showcasing Careers in Biotech for the Next Generation

SILENCE THERAPEUTICS

Have you ever wondered what it takes to start a career in biotechnology? For many of our colleagues, they weren't aware of what a career in biotech could look like until they had one. To help aspiring biotech professionals understand what a career in the industry may entail, we are showcasing the varied journeys of our colleagues.

Introducing: Barbara Ruskin

Can you tell us a little about yourself and your role at Silence?

I'm Barbara Ruskin, and I am the Senior Vice President, General Counsel and Chief Patent Officer at Silence.

My role at Silence is varied, but in a more general sense I spend time building a strong patent portfolio to protect Silence's proprietary platform inventions and pipeline products; understanding the competitive patent landscape in our fields of technology, negotiating licenses and partnership deals with other companies, academic and clinical centres; working with the finance team to raise money to support our research; and providing constant legal advice to the company on a wide range of topics. To give some context to the scope of my role, two of the big projects I was closely involved with last year were (i) helping land the NASDAQ listing (we are now dual-listed on the London AIM stock exchange and on NASDAQ and will shortly be delisting from AIM) and (ii) being on the negotiation team that closed our AstraZeneca collaboration agreement – for each, there were many days and nights spent strategizing, negotiating and processing megabytes of paperwork, with the help of outside counsel. A big goal of mine is to help grow public awareness in the US of Silence and its technology platform and products, as I was the pioneer who incorporated Silence in the US and opened our first office here.

When and how did you decide 'what you wanted to do' for your career?

I worked hard and wandered along a path that led me to where I am now. While my academic life started in biochemistry, I hadn't planned to study science initially. However, my interest in the human brain got me there at university. After my undergraduate degree I continued the science route and earned my PhD in biochemistry and molecular biology working on mRNA splicing. But after a few post-doctoral years, I needed a change from the world of academia.

While I never planned early on to be at the intersection of science, law and business, it's where I've happily landed now. After leaving the lab, I studied for my law degree at night while working full time at a law firm where I ended up working for 18 years. After that, I started my own firm, where I ultimately was introduced to Silence as a consultant. It wasn't long after that I became an integral part of the Silence team and was hired as a full-time employee.

Qualifications	University
• B.A. Biochemistry	University of California, Berkeley, USA
• Ph.D. Biochemistry and Molecular Biology	Harvard University, USA
• J.D. Law	Fordham University School of Law, USA

I am sure that without my science background or law qualifications, I wouldn't be here at Silence. It's exciting to be working with the teams here in designing safe and effective drugs to treat unmet medical needs using siRNA technology in a field of RNA chemistry which I know so well from my earlier days in academia.

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Can you describe your career pathway in more detail?

My career is one of many changes; I followed one path and meandered to many other ones, only to end up with them intersecting. I didn't expect to study science, but I did. I didn't expect get a law degree or become a patent lawyer or start my own firm, but I did. Being able to realize what most excited me, to pivot and work hard for it got me where I am now – and I couldn't be happier to be in this sweet spot at the intersection of science, law and business.

It's exciting for me to be the General Counsel and Chief Patent Officer and to be on the leadership team at Silence, as I get to see the full perspective of the business while continuing to secure patents using my background in biochemistry and patent law. And without that start in science, I don't think this would have been possible.

What are your interests in and outside of work? How have they influenced your career pathway?

I love to find win-win situations for people, whether it be making decisions with co-workers, or negotiating agreements with adversarial third parties. I really enjoy explaining science to non-scientists and law to non-lawyers. Communication and bridging the gap in understanding is key. Outside of work, I enjoy being outdoors, fine food and drink shared with family and friends, dancing, making pottery and knitting while watching good films or shows.

What is your proudest professional highlight to date at Silence?

Two come to mind: helping land the NASDAQ listing and securing multiple partnership deals. As mentioned earlier, the NASDAQ listing took a lot of effort to complete, and we finally got listed in September 2020. It was a proud moment. We also have collaborations with AstraZeneca, Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals, and most recently, Hansoh Pharma, each of which I helped negotiate. We're working together with each company on developing different therapeutics for unmet medical needs, from targeting cardiovascular and kidney diseases to finding ways to supress proteins to modulate the immune system.

If you could give a piece of career advice to your 21-year-old self, what would it be?

Don't assume that a dream is impossible because "I'm not good enough" or "it's too late to change my mind" – just go for it and maybe no one will stop you! It's the path you wander and who you meet along the way that matters the most, don't worry about sticking to "the plans" – be nimble and follow your passion.

What advice would you give someone considering a career in a biotech company?

Biotechnology is a thrilling sector, although not for the faint of heart. It's highly technical and evolves quickly, translating cutting edge science into clinical possibilities as quickly as possible in a high risk, high reward setting. It's exciting to be part of an organization whose goal is to design and bring innovative medicines to people in need worldwide. And you don't have to be a trained scientist to consider such a career – biotech companies need finance, HR, IT and legal departments as well as research, development, marketing and commercialization.