BioSpectrum
the business of Bio & Health Sciences
ASIA EDITION

Upskilling and flexibility are key to staying relevant as hiring grows

May 31, 2025 | Analysis | By Ayesha Siddiqui

With ongoing uncertainty, geopolitical tensions, and recession risks, the life sciences job market remains volatile. The year 2024 saw continued layoffs, cautious investor sentiment, and growing competition for fewer job openings. As biopharma companies restructure, hiring patterns are changing, especially at mid and senior levels. What are the current trends, and which sectors are hiring the most? Let's find out.



The biopharma job market has been tough, with widespread downsizing and frequent layoffs across big pharma. But the worst may be over. Hiring activity is picking up, especially in the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region. A quick search on our sister website, *BioSpectrum jobs* for April and May 2025 shows strong, diverse recruitment across all levels from internships to senior leadership in key hubs like Singapore, Tokyo, Bengaluru, and Shanghai. Demand is high for clinical research, regulatory affairs, medical science liaison, and digital marketing roles, while leadership hiring focuses on strategy, sales, and commercial functions.

“The pharmaceutical sector’s job landscape has showcased an improving trend in recent months. For instance, job postings were up by around 8 per cent in April 2025 compared to the previous month. Similarly, March 2025 also saw job postings register a month-on-month growth of more than 25 per cent,” said **Sherla Sriprada, Senior Business Fundamentals Analyst at GlobalData**.

This sustained uptick in hiring reflects how companies are responding to evolving workforce dynamics and talent demands.

“The biopharma job market is experiencing several key trends. High executive turnover, as observed in 2024, continues to influence recruitment needs. Companies are leveraging headquarters and regional resources to supplement local talent with global expertise. They are also focusing on candidates who can learn and grow in dynamic environments, due to cautious attitudes toward job changes and the emergence of younger generations,” said **Terrence Chen, Manager, Robert Walters China**.

Sherla mentions that there have been notable job postings for roles related to clinical trials, regulatory compliance, immuno-oncology, cell & gene therapy, and digital therapeutics. Meanwhile, there is also demand for senior positions and the skills

sought for these roles typically include:

- Leadership experience
- Project management and strategic planning
- Understanding of regulatory requirements
- Experience with AI/ML applications in drug discovery
- Familiarity with industry platforms such as Veeva and CRM/data management tools like IQVIA and Symphony
- Experience in implementation of diverse clinical technologies

“Demand is particularly high for specialised talent in areas such as pre-clinical scientists, medical affairs professionals, market access experts, and business development and marketing roles. These roles are crucial for driving innovation, development, and market success in the biopharma industry,” said Chen.

This demand is also reflected in the APAC region, where growing investment in biotech is driving hiring in research and regulatory roles.

“We’re seeing a transformation in the APAC region, with a strong push to localise operations. There has been major investment in biotech recently, particularly in R&D across China, Korea, Japan, Singapore, and Thailand. This growth has increased hiring, especially in research and regulatory affairs. The need for talent in research is obvious; However, as geographies expand, so does the need to have experts in regulatory affairs who understand local laws and market entry points and liaise closely with their correspondents in other countries to gain approval and get products to the market,” said **Zenab Nessa, Vice President at EPM Scientific**.

While regulatory and research roles remain essential, the talent landscape is also shifting toward more tech-driven and data-centric roles.

“AI in healthcare continues to be a significant area of growth, especially in drug discovery. The new tech is streamlining processes, improving efficiency, and cutting costs. We’re seeing a notable uptick in hiring for data science and bioinformatics roles, with clients expanding their search geographically and increasingly accommodating relocations to meet this demand. Unsurprisingly, cell and gene therapy, biosimilars, and digital health all continue to be sectors with the highest demand for talent,” said Zenab.

The biopharmaceutical market is still in a state of contraction, with a significant reduction in biopharma positions. However, experts feel the demand for marketing talent remains, especially for mid-to-senior management roles, whether in top multinational corporations, large domestic enterprises, or innovative pharmaceutical companies.

“With new products and pipelines set to launch, some companies are expanding their marketing teams across different levels. Additionally, as demand in the innovation and internationalisation sectors rises—driven by frequent overseas transactions of innovative drugs (such as ADC and small nucleic acid drug licensing)—business development professionals with global vision and successful transaction experience have become industry focal points,” said **Karl Zhu, Business Director, Hays Shanghai and Life Science Lead of Hays China**.

Layoffs reshape hiring landscape

2024 was brutal for pharma and biotech jobseekers. All the major pharmaceutical companies announced layoffs, with firms like Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, Bayer, Bristol Myers Squibb, and others undergoing large-scale workforce reductions. This wave of cuts reflects a period of deep, industry-wide financial restructuring. The trend continued into 2025, albeit at a slower pace, with companies like Eisai and Ono also announcing job cuts. Almost every part of the value chain has been affected from digital operations to research and development.

“Companies across various sectors are undergoing streamlining and flattening of organisational structures, with foreign enterprises particularly focusing on optimising mid-to-senior management positions and non-strategic business lines for the future. From the perspective of recruitment supply and demand, available positions are typically aimed at solving specific business challenges and require candidates with proven success and mature experience. The previous trend of rapid promotion to higher roles has largely disappeared. Instead, more experienced professionals are now accepting lower positions to meet corporate needs,” said Zhu.

Middle-level roles across both core and non-core areas have been heavily impacted, with layoffs among mid-to-senior management in non-core functions continuing to escalate.

“Mid-level hiring has seen reduced opportunities, especially in non-core areas like clinical operations for halted trials, with hiring freezes becoming common. In contrast, startups and SMEs are actively recruiting talented candidates affected by layoffs,” said Chen.

Some experts feel the situation is more nuanced, as there remains strong demand for mid and senior-level roles despite heightened competition.

“There is strong demand for mid and senior-level roles, but the market is more competitive due to recent layoffs. With more candidates and fewer roles, professionals need to set themselves apart. One effective strategy is to emphasise the diversity and range of your skill set. Candidates with experience across verticals, like clinical and regulatory, are particularly attractive to employers looking to consolidate hires,” said Zenab.

Meanwhile, competition for management roles has also intensified, with companies placing greater emphasis on cost-effectiveness. The number of senior positions has declined, leading to saturation in the demand for functional directors and above.

“For senior positions, there's a focus on securing C-suite executives with expertise in digital transformation or global market access. Additionally, senior roles in business development and post-merger integration have become critical due to ongoing industry consolidation (M&A integration),” said Chen.

That said, “not all leadership hiring is visible on the surface,” adds Zenab. “It’s also worth noting that many of these senior-level opportunities are part of confidential mandates. Layoffs and restructuring aren’t always public, and leadership teams often hire behind the scenes. So, although it may seem that there are fewer advertised roles, it is an important time to lean on your network, connect with trusted talent partners, and keep an eye on the market.”

Skills in demand

In 2025, as technology, data, and AI continue to drive pharmaceutical innovation, companies are increasingly recognising the critical role of talent in this transformation. According to ZS’s survey of 127 technology executives at multinational biotechnology, pharma, and life sciences companies, over 60 per cent view upskilling and AI literacy programmes as vital to boosting generative AI adoption. Additionally, about 70 per cent plan to invest in AI literacy and training initiatives for their broader workforces in 2025, with industry leaders like AstraZeneca, Merck, and Johnson & Johnson already making such investments to stay ahead in the evolving landscape.

“Beyond the demand for AI and data science skills, companies are actively seeking candidates with expertise in regulatory affairs, market access, and regulatory submissions. To attract senior leadership talent, companies are focusing on flexibility, offering equity, customised interview experiences, and remote roles that span multiple time zones. Ultimately, what draws top candidates is a sense of purpose and alignment with company goals,” said Zenab.

Pharma firms are evolving pipeline and launch strategies. Therefore, deep domain expertise has become critical.

“Additionally, domain expertise is essential for quickly integrating new pipelines, technologies, or products into the market and leveraging existing specialised knowledge,” said Chen.

The biopharma industry is also witnessing a surge in demand for leadership talent equipped with specific skills and qualifications.

“Companies are placing a high value on commercial acumen, particularly the ability to navigate pricing pressures such as those from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) in the U.S., and to effectively expand into emerging markets like the Asia-Pacific region. Cross-functional leadership is also crucial, with experience in managing global teams, including in hybrid and remote settings, being highly sought after,” said Chen.

Furthermore, organisations are investing in robust succession planning and leadership development programmes to ensure continuity and growth in leadership roles.

“Professionals with forward-looking business insights and exceptional team leadership skills are the ideal choice for enterprises, whether driving breakthroughs or maintaining stability. Candidates with extensive industry resources and

networks, who can help companies achieve greater efficiency at lower costs, are particularly sought after. In the fields of research and clinical development, senior candidates must possess a relevant educational background and solid academic knowledge, along with extensive experience in research or clinical projects—whether successfully leading a pipeline to market or learning from failed projects. Additionally, strong team management skills and sharp market insight are essential for navigating complex pipeline environments, identifying core trends, and strategically positioning companies for success," said Zhu.

There's cautious optimism for the job market but as with many industries, upskilling and being adaptable will be crucial to staying relevant in biopharma's evolving landscape.

Ayesha Siddiqui