



# BIOPHARMA STRATEGY CONSULTING

**Josephine Choo, PhD  
Consultant**

*After completing her bachelor and master studies at Imperial College, Josephine obtained her PhD in molecular oncology from University of Göttingen. At Scitaris, Josephine is particularly excited to use her scientific background, problem-solving and data analysis skills to develop actionable R&D strategy solutions for her clients.*

## Josephine, why did you join Scitaris?

"Since I was young, I have always been interested in science, especially Biology, learning about how different organisms function and what can go wrong that leads to diseases. That was why I proceeded to embark on my scientific career and went on to pursue a PhD in Molecular Oncology. However, with time I was getting frustrated with the lack of clinical impact I was making in academia. I wanted to try something new and I was surrounded by peers who moved into consulting once they have completed their PhD. I was also intrigued by the idea and by the prospect of making an impact with my work compared to the basic research that I had been doing. To me, Scitaris checked these boxes:

### 1) Their focus and strategy

Scitaris is a boutique Life Science consulting firm that strongly emphasizes on deep scientific understanding and data-driven recommendations to pharma or biotech companies. Whilst I wanted to leave academia, I still very much love Science and the aspects around trying to understand a dataset or brainstorming new hypotheses to answer specific questions. Scitaris basically allows me to get the best of both worlds – on one hand I am still very much in touch with science, and able to apply my nearly decade's worth of scientific background, and on the other hand being quite at the forefront of clinical impact by supporting pharma and biotech companies around a broad range of therapeutic areas.

### 2) The small team

Back when I interviewed for the position, the team only comprised of 5 people, including the 3 managing partners. While it has grown to nearly 20 people in the past 2 years, I still consider it a relatively small team compared to some larger organizations. Personally, I have a preference of working in smaller teams as I feel that the environment stimulates my growth more. I felt that a smaller team would mean I was going to get more support and that I was going to be able to work directly with the managing partners and learn so much more. As I was jumping into a completely new field of work, feeling supported during this steep learning curve was extremely important to me.

### 3) The culture

I am a firm believer of surrounding yourself with people who motivate and bring out the best in you. I had a very positive experience meeting the team for the first time during my interview and I was surprised by how friendly and humble everyone was. It was so inspiring to be around such a bright, young and amazing team! Despite being 5 people back then, it also felt really international, which was an important aspect for me as a foreigner. I immediately sensed a really conducive and open environment, which led to me happily accepting the offer after I got the call and I have no regrets!"



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### Josephine, tell us more about your typical working day at Scitaris.

"This can vary quite a bit and it really depends on the type and number of projects I am staffed on. I am more often than not staffed on a single main project at a time but can also be supporting other projects depending on my bandwidth.

My day usually starts at about 9:00am and on days where I do not have client meetings or any internal calls, I work on completing analyses that I have set out on my to-do list.

What this means is that I mainly put together a deck to answer a number of questions that revolve around the following (but not limited to):

- 1) Does the mechanism of action make sense in the indication it is being developed in?
- 2) What does the available data look like and how convincing is it?
- 3) What is the market like for this indication and is there an unmet need that we can fulfill?
- 4) What could be the development challenges associated with the indication or asset?

Answering these questions may involve reading up primary research papers, digging up and understanding competitor's data, looking at patents, searching for key opinion leader interviews or disease analysis reports.

My day can start with reading up and understanding basic mechanism of actions in the morning, and switch to going through patient data from a large phase III trial in the afternoon; it is never dull or boring!

On days where I have a client meeting, it starts off with a touch point call with my manager where we would discuss the analyses that I had put together for the client meeting later that day. Some days, this might lead to another discussion with my manager in the afternoon before we send off a pre-read deck. I will then get on with completing other analyses ahead of the next client meeting or work on another project, which can also include meetings with a different team. If time permits (this is not always the case), I like to block about half an hour to an hour on my calendar, right before my client call to go through and re-familiarize myself with the deck. At the end of the meeting, I would have noted down a couple of action items, have a quick debrief chat with my manager and schedule the pending items into my calendar/ to-do list. Depending on how urgent those are, I will get started on them immediately and finish with the rest in my to-do list before ending the day."





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### Josephine, what was the biggest challenge for you since you started working at Scitaris?

"I think one of the biggest challenges was having to work from home due to the lockdown from Covid-19. I consider myself relatively lucky as I still managed to work in the office in my first two months. However, the lack of face to face interaction in the beginning was tough especially as a newbie – but my team and my manager were especially good at making sure my colleagues and I feel supported by scheduling regular update calls and that helped immensely!

Apart from that, I think the first couple of weeks and months were probably the most challenging generally. Jumping from academia to consulting meant that the learning curve was extremely steep and almost everyday felt completely new to me. I was learning new terminologies that I had rarely used or heard of prior to this job. On top of that, my first ever project was dermatology-based, something that I had no prior experience in, as my research focus over the years has been oncology. I remember having to spend some extra time in the day trying to understand patho-physiologies of different dermatological diseases in order to properly evaluate potential opportunities. Also, I was pretty much immediately given the opportunity to actively participate during client meetings from my second week onwards – and that meant presenting my analyses to c-level executives. Whilst I appreciated the opportunity and have learned so much since, that was definitely one of the more challenging aspects in the beginning!"

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### Josephine, which competencies are important for a Consultant at Scitaris?

"At Scitaris, we pride ourselves by providing scientific and data-based recommendations to our clients. Therefore, it is important that a consultant is able to critically analyze a dataset, be it a simple protein expression blot, pre-clinical tumor growth plots, patient cytokine expression data and patient response – and putting all these information into context. It is a requirement to have obtained a PhD in a life science or biomedical field and naturally have a deep scientific understanding.

This is essential to produce the standard of analysis that we strive towards. It is of no surprise that being a consultant is a demanding job, and we are usually required to quickly adapt to changes and different client requirements. I believe that the soft skills such as those learned during a PhD including time and project management, resilience and self-discipline are really important skills to have.

As we are a Life Science focus consultancy firm, having a general interest and basic understanding of the pharmaceutical industry and healthcare space is also important.

Lastly, being able to comfortably and effectively communicate in English is a must as many of our clients are US-based and our primary language is English."





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### Josephine, how would you describe the team spirit at Scitaris?

"One of the core reasons why I decided to join Scitaris was the positive atmosphere that I experienced during my first meeting and interview with the team. I appreciate the non-hierarchical, open-communication within the company – and how we are allowed to bring our individual strengths to the table. Everyone is genuinely helpful and very supportive and I have had no problems openly asking or clarifying things with the team in situations where I have had doubts – which I personally believe is key to my development and growth as a consultant.

Apart from that, the pandemic has also meant that most of us are rarely in the same room or building together, which brought about the virtual coffee mornings and lunch dates that we have internally organized within the team. Every Wednesday morning (or whenever more ideal), a group of us can pop onto a “virtual meeting room” to chat and catch up about anything non-work related – as a way to maintain social contact with the team. In addition, using a similar platform, we also have weekly virtual lunch dates where we can schedule with our colleagues. As an incentive, the company covers (for the most part) the cost of the food and delivery. I find things like these extremely helpful, especially with the ongoing pandemic – which clearly goes to show how much we prioritize a positive team spirit and environment in the company. The handful of times where we were all able to meet in real life together have also been extremely enjoyable – mostly over food and wine during company or project dinners.

Last year, at our company retreat in Szczecin, Poland, the team had a great time bonding over a vodka, beer and food tour, shooting at each other at lasertag and trying to break free an escape room. I honestly can say that I enjoy everyone’s company immensely, both inside and outside of work and I am extremely grateful to be around these amazing people daily as I am aware of how rare this is!"



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### Josephine, is there anything that adds extra value for you to the job at Scitaris?

"I think something that stands out to me with Scitaris is the immediate exposure I got to being involved in the final deck preparation, participate in client calls, as well as being able to present my analyses to c-level executives at the get go.

Whilst it may be intimidating at first, I found this a fantastic learning experience. The company also regularly organizes training courses throughout the year for the team. Thus far, this has ranged from statistical courses to help better understand how clinical trials are powered & designed or communication courses to more effectively convey our points across in client meetings. We also have an intellectual property course lined up and potentially a data analysis using Excel course which I am really excited for! That's not even all - on top of the company-wide training, every employee has an allowance of 12 full working days to take up courses or attend conferences to further expand our knowledge and develop our skillset.

I don't think you often come across a company that really values and tries to booster your development - and that is honestly what makes Scitaris so special."

**Thank you Josephine.**