

Biomed talent war

Demand for junior staff up as life sciences boom

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LIFE sciences graduates with only basic degrees may end up washing test tubes, so said Mr Philip Yeo, former chairman of the Agency for Science, Technology and Research. Even so, such qualified personnel doing routine work are in demand, with the boom in the biomedical sciences sector.

According to global headhunting firm ScienTec Consulting, the rapid growth of Asia's biomedical sciences industry has fuelled an increasing demand not just for senior staff, but also for junior and mid-level scientists and executives. The need is in areas such as clinical research, medical devices, manufacturing, even sales and marketing.

"The global talent war has started," said Ms Karen Tok, ScienTec Consulting's managing director. "We are seeing an increasing number of junior Asian expatriates being hired by organisations in Asia, the United States and Europe.

"It is no longer a strategy for cost-cutting, but an issue of real talent shortage."

Dx Assays, a molecular diagnostics company that is setting up shop here, is

facing the crunch in trying to fill some 10 to 15 positions for junior research associates – that is, technicians – and junior scientists. Those qualifying must have a Bachelor's or Master's degree, while PhDs and industry experience would be preferred for those eyeing the post of junior scientist.

"While our senior scientific staff set the direction for research and development in the company, it is our junior scientists who carry out much of the scientific activities," said chief executive Dr Michael Pau-men.

"It's a numbers game – with senior staff, you may just need one or two, but recruiting numerous junior staff is a challenge."

With the global shortage of such people, it's no surprise that they command fairly high starting salaries, with starting pay for graduates in Singapore reportedly between \$2,500 and \$3,000 a month.

Clinical research associates, medical writers as well as marketing and public relations personnel are in great demand. Singaporeans, in particular, are viewed favourably because of their multilingual abilities, quality of work, discipline and management experience, said Ms Tok.

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