

“Intellectually challenging and socially beneficial...”

Bio-economy Career Profile

Position: Senior Biostatistician

Name: Anona Thorne

Company: Canadian HIV Trials Network

Salary Range: \$60,000 to \$80,000 per year

What I do:

I am a statistician. I work at the Canadian HIV Trials Network, where we run studies of HIV and AIDS treatments and treatment strategies. These studies, called clinical, are the result of ideas from researchers in the network. For example, someone might hypothesize that drug A might work better than drug B for a certain condition, so we set up a trail with two groups of patients in order to test this hypothesis. I take the results of these clinical trials and analyze them. Then, with my colleagues, I write up the results and present them at conferences, post them to our website, and publish them in scientific journals. I also assist with organizing the study teams for the clinical trials that we conduct.

My workday varies. Since I am in charge of the study team structure, a certain amount of time is spent on organizational matters, such as arranging meetings or updating the internal study-team website. Often, I will have consultations with other statisticians or staff regarding particular studies and topics. Depending on the stage of the trials that I'm working on, I may work on the plan for a new trail, the statistical analysis of one which has been completed, the revision of a trial report or on producing plots for slides or posters used to present trial results at an upcoming conference.

What education and skills do candidates need for this position?

You require a Master's degree in Statistics. If you do not have a Master's degree, but sufficient experience with



statistical data analysis, it is conceivable that you could start in a junior analytical position and work your way up, given the right environment. However, this depends on conditions in the job market and this sort of opportunity may not be easy to find.

For this position, you require organizational skills, written and oral communication skills, mathematical and statistical skills, and analytical ability.

Before I came to this job, I spent several years working in computer science in both educational and business environments. I then returned to university to complete a Bachelor's degree in Mathematics and a Master's degree in Statistics. Several organizations contacted our department for graduates' names, and my present job was one of them; the job sounded ideal to me.

What are the best parts of your job?

The best thing about my job is that I get to work on a variety of intellectually challenging and socially beneficial projects.

There are so many interesting possibilities. Statisticians are essential in so many areas that you have an opportunity to work in many different fields. And as statistical techniques evolve, you always keep learning. Most people have such a limited idea of what a biostatistician does, if they have any idea at all, that when they find out about all the possibilities, it's a revelation to them.