

# How Women Are Driving Meaningful Change in the Biopharma Industry

Melissa Vekil

In Canada, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) professions are still heavily male-dominated. In fact, women make up less than one quarter of people employed in STEM careers. Building the next generation of female STEM talent is critical for solving the complex problems of today and the future.

Despite the societal barriers, the opportunity to guide young girls to develop a passion for STEM and global sciences is more important than ever. Fortunately, the foundation exists. According to a 2019 survey by Microsoft, 52 per cent of girls aged 12 to 17 said they would consider a job in a technology or science-related field. There are endless opportunities for women to not only break barriers

but to thrive in the STEM industry.

There are a growing number of Canadian companies championing this cause by recruiting and retaining more female talent. As a leading biopharma in Canada and with a mission to discover, develop and deliver innovative medicines that help patients prevail over serious diseases, Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS) is inspiring a new generation of women within the pharma industry. With 184 women in STEM roles, 68 per cent of women in Senior Manager positions and 66 per cent of women in Manager positions, BMS is committed to embracing gender representation and diversity by advancing the careers of women in biopharma.

Here are the stories of some of the women at BMS who are making a difference.

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## Filippa Pettersson

Senior Scientific Advisor,  
Medical Lead,  
CAR T

### What made you decide on a STEM career?

My passion for STEM started in high school. I found the science program very interesting and was already curious about the medical field. I was fascinated by the immune system, a topic very relevant to the work I do today.

### Tell me about your career path.

I have a PhD in molecular and cellular sciences. I worked in academic research in oncology before joining medical affairs at BMS six years ago. As

a Senior Scientific Advisor, I'm responsible for portions of the company's medical strategy to bring new personalized therapies to Canadian cancer patients. I also advise different divisions, specifically cancer immunotherapy – working closely with the clinical research and commercial teams as a link between research, development, and the real world. Being able to explain the science to others is an important part of my role.

### How has BMS provided you with opportunities as a woman in STEM?

I have always felt extremely supported by BMS. I'm part of an employee resource group at BMS that supports the development of women. We focus on career development, work-life balance and host events, for example networking events, specifically aimed at women. I have also had the opportunity to take part in a global mentorship program.

### What do you love about working at BMS?

We all have the same mission, which is to improve the lives of patients. It's a mission that's close to everybody's heart and we can all unite around it.



## Lisa Willoughby

Senior Manager,  
Clinical Operations,  
Site Monitoring

### What made you decide on a STEM career?

From a young age, I had a love for science. I wanted to understand the way things worked – our bodies, the world around us. My mom was a nurse. She instilled my passion for science and inspired me to pursue nursing.

### Tell me about your career path.

For the first 10 years of my career, I was a critical care nurse. There, I was exposed to pharma and wanted to better understand the research side

of patient care. I then worked as a research nurse in cardiology before joining BMS. I first worked in the field as a Clinical Trial Monitor, and now I'm a Clinical Operations Manager.

### How has BMS provided you with opportunities as a woman in STEM?

BMS is incredibly supportive of all development opportunities. We are encouraged to grow and develop.

### What advice would you give to a young girl considering a role in STEM?

Follow your passion, and don't limit yourself. Women are still underrepresented in STEM, but by supporting one another we can create more opportunities. With a science degree, the opportunities out there are huge. I would also encourage women to have a female mentor.



## Vanessa Berkling

Senior Manager,  
Medical Education MS, UC,  
Psoriasis and Rheumatology

### What made you decide on a STEM career?

My background is in communications and commerce, but I moved to pharma in 2002. I was given an exciting opportunity when someone took a chance and offered me a contract sales role which turned into the career I have today.

### Tell me about your career path.

I started in sales, where I had the opportunity to connect with physicians. Seeing healthcare providers solve serious health issues and address

challenges inspired my passion for science. Today, as a Senior Medical Education Manager at BMS, I help identify innovative, high-quality medical education opportunities that close gaps in healthcare provider knowledge; strengthening their professional competence and ultimately improving patient outcomes.

### How has BMS provided you with opportunities as a woman in STEM?

One of BMS' biggest strengths is its people. Everyone is dedicated to making an impact on patients' lives. BMS reinforces a culture of diversity and inclusion. There are mentorship programs and courses that provide endless opportunities to feel empowered.

### What advice would you give to a young girl considering a role in STEM?

It's never too early and it's never too late. I didn't have a traditional path in to STEM and was able to pivot. It's okay to try something new and fail, but it's not okay to not try.



## Nadia Turchetta

Head,  
Oncology

### What made you decide on a STEM career?

Instead of putting pressure on myself to immediately commit to one specific career path, I decided to approach my career by looking at different industries. Having the privilege to work for an industry that has revolutionized the way we treat certain diseases and improves the lives of patients is a great reason to get up and go to work every day.

### Tell me about your career path.

I had a traditional commercial pharmaceutical career path. I started as a medical representative and took on roles of increased responsibility across multiple areas of business.

### How has BMS provided you with opportunities as a woman in STEM?

BMS offered me this position when I was eight months pregnant. I don't know many companies that would do this. This gave me a glimpse for how female talent is supported at BMS.

### What advice would you give to a young girl considering a role in STEM?

The advice I have goes for anyone considering a career in STEM or another field. Don't feel like you need to figure out the career you will do for the rest of your life right out of high school. Be curious, flexible and follow your interests. Your career can evolve and change. And finally, don't assume you need a science degree for a career in STEM.

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