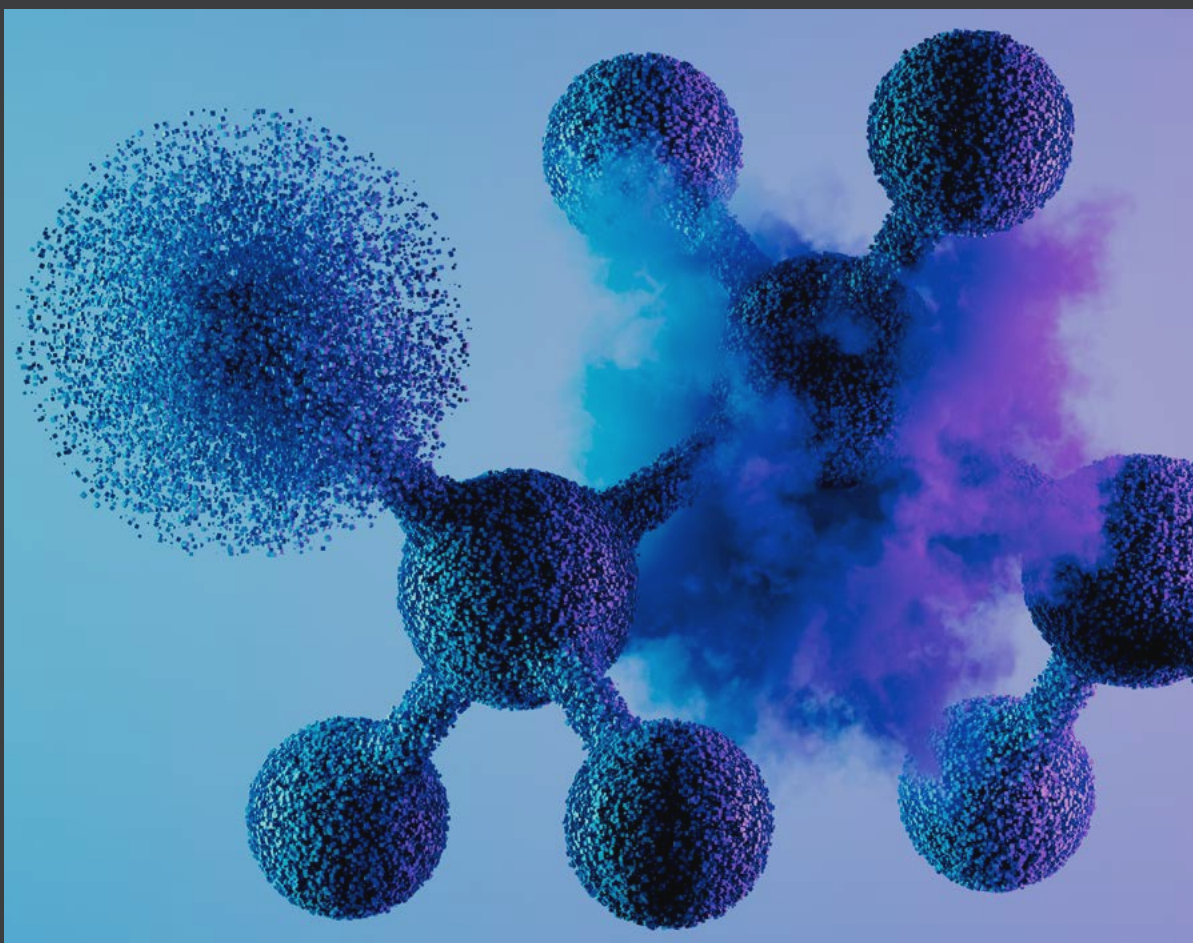
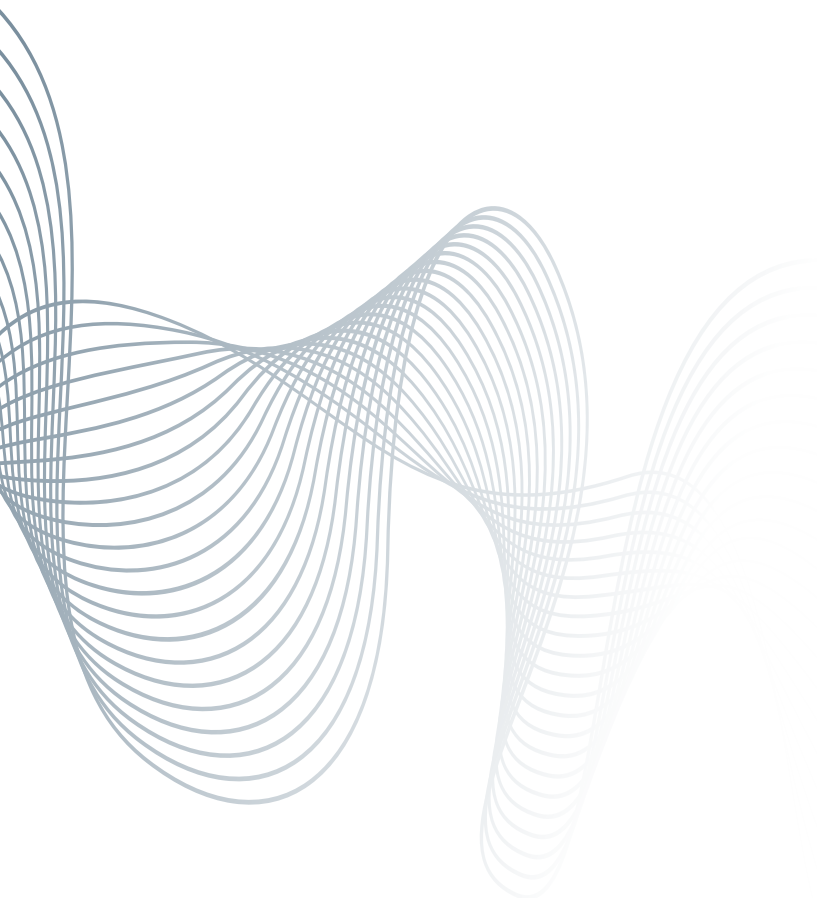


Accelerating Biopharma Growth through Strategic Interim Medical and Clinical Leadership

GEORGE QUINN | 2025






The recent CMO360 conference in Boston, a gathering of biotech Chief Medical Officers (CMOs), spotlighted a significant shift in how biopharma companies are accessing leadership talent across clinical and medical functions. As organizations navigate capital constraints and seek specialized expertise, the need for more flexible, real-time leadership solutions surged, specifically for interim and on-demand leaders.

This shift in leadership perspectives stood out at CMO360. Just a few years ago, interim and on-demand CMOs were rarely discussed; this year, they were central to conversations about strategic growth and capital efficiency. The era of the one-size-fits-all leadership team is over, and today's biopharma companies need to view their leadership roadmaps as multi-dimensional and dynamic resourcing plans, not just a fixed organizational chart.

This article explores the advantages, potential challenges, and strategic value that various interim leadership models bring to biopharma companies. Our insights come from several sources, including: WittKieffer's experience in executive search, interim leadership, and leadership advisory; recent interviews our team conducted with active CMO leaders, both those working in-house and those being engaged in interim roles; and key takeaways from the CMO360 conference held in April 2025.



Leveraging Interim and On-Demand Leaders for Success

INTERIM LEADERS

- Temporarily employed executives who fill a specific leadership role in an organization.
- Experienced executives with a track record of success in similar roles, retained to provide leadership and direction to a team.
- Make critical decisions, drive results, and ensure business continuity during periods of change.
- KPIs: Role-based responsibilities.

ON-DEMAND LEADERS

- Executives and/or former consultants providing leadership and expertise on a project-by-project basis.
- Subject matter experts with deep knowledge and experience in particular areas, engaged to provide hands-on work, guidance, advice, and support to the team for specific projects or initiatives.
- KPIs: Specific deliverables.

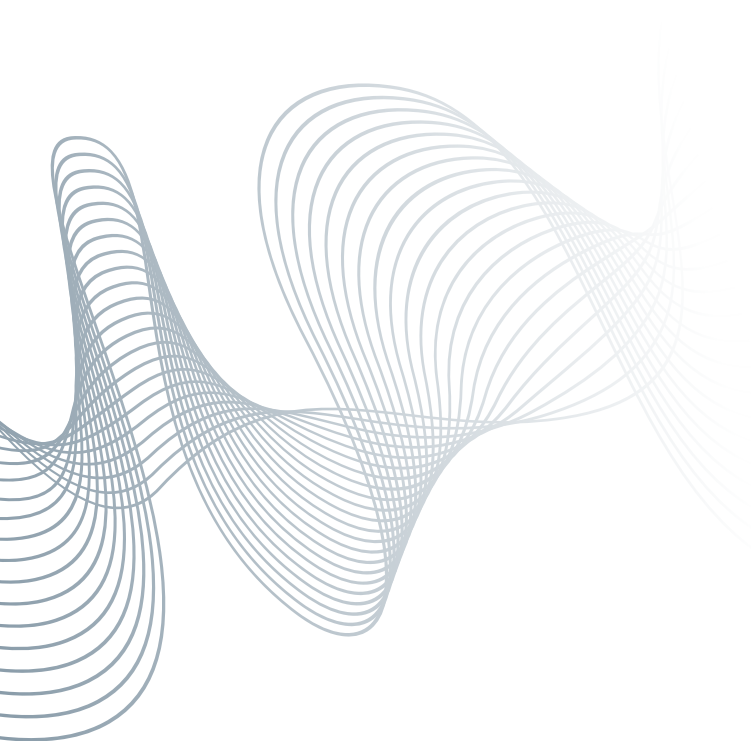
FULL-TIME

- Interim or on-demand leaders, retained to work on a full-time basis, either onsite or in a hybrid model, to fill a specific leadership need in an organization.
- Engaged to manage periods of transition, fill capability gaps, or lead specific projects required immediate attention.

PART-TIME OR FRACTIONAL

- Interim or on-demand leaders, contracted to work on a part-time basis to fill a specific leadership or advisory role in an organization.
- May work onsite or remotely and typically have a set schedule, with project structures depending on the leader's availability and deadlines.

Interim leadership delivers tangible strategic advantages for biopharma companies at critical development stages. In the following, we explore how these flexible leadership models create value by addressing specific organizational needs and accelerating progress toward key milestones.



ELEVATE CLINICAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

through Targeted Interim Leadership
Access to interim and on-demand talent can be game-changing for biopharma organizations prioritizing strategic growth. This advantage is particularly critical for early-phase clinical leadership, where attention diverted to day-to-day operational demands can cause long-term strategic clinical development planning to suffer. Without dedicated clinical strategy expertise, companies risk suboptimal trial design, inefficient resource allocation, and, ultimately, extended timelines to key value inflection points.

Strategic deployment of interim medical leadership addresses these gaps by providing targeted expertise precisely when needed. Companies that lack established relationships with talent access partners often find themselves overly reliant on their internal talent bench and their own limited external networks or those of their investors, such as PE or VC firms, potentially missing opportunities to engage world-class talent that could accelerate their development timelines.

ALIGN INTERIM MEDICAL LEADERSHIP WITH YOUR GROWTH TRAJECTORY

Biopharma companies traverse distinct growth phases and milestones, creating natural inflection points in specialized leadership requirements. Understanding how interim CMO roles fit into your overall leadership roadmap is essential for maintaining the flexibility to evolve your leadership structure as talent needs evolve.

For example, during transitions between preclinical and clinical phases or when preparing for regulatory milestones, biopharma companies can strategically deploy interim or on-demand medical leadership to provide targeted expertise precisely when needed. With clear role objectives, defined metrics of success, and predetermined triggers for transitioning to full-time leadership, these interim leaders help establish and scale critical functions to support rapid growth and integration. As the organization matures, interim leaders can transition to permanent roles or support the recruitment and onboarding of their full-time successors, ensuring continuity of vision and strategy.

EMBRACE INTERIM CMOS TO CLOSE THE CLINICAL VOICE GAP

The demand for interim leadership is increasing, particularly among capital-constrained startups. This trend toward bringing in a critical clinical voice is especially pronounced in digital health and tech-enabled biopharma companies that have strong technical foundations but lack dedicated clinical expertise. These organizations are finding that interim and on-demand CMOs offer a compelling, cost-effective solution, providing access to

seasoned medical leadership that would be otherwise unavailable or unaffordable at their current early stage.

A key insight from industry leaders: When bringing in your first clinical or medical leader — whether part-time/fractional or full-time — ensure they report directly to the CEO (vs. a COO or any other C-suite role). This reporting structure elevates the clinical perspective in strategic discussions and signals the importance of medical expertise to the entire organization.

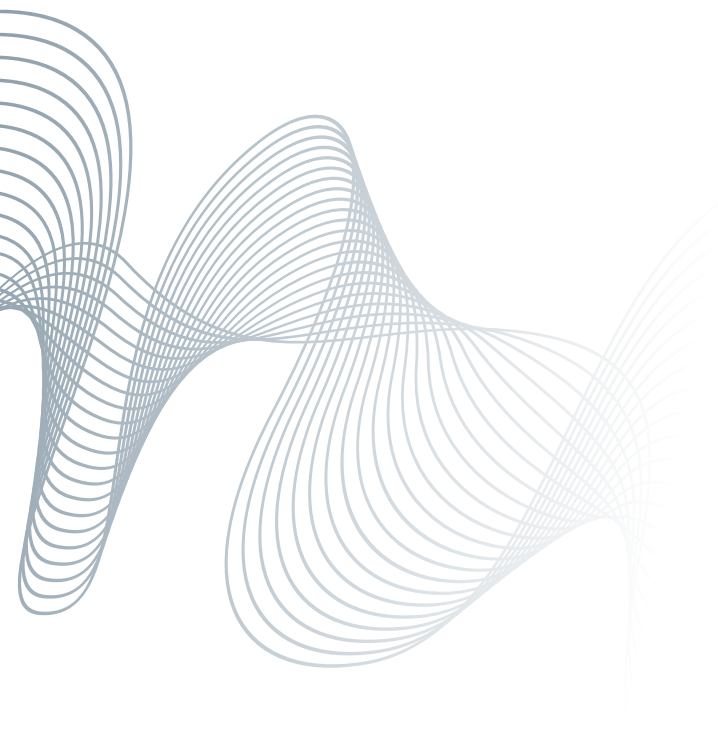
LEVERAGE INTERIM CMOS TO BUILD MULTIDISCIPLINARY EXCELLENCE

Creating a multidisciplinary team throughout clinical development is crucial for lean organizations, whether they are developing their first or fifth asset. Effective collaboration across regulatory, safety, biostatistics, and clinical operations functions significantly increases the likelihood of success. When organizations lack specific expertise in-house, talent access firms help identify and deploy fit-for-purpose specialized leaders through their extensive networks, filling critical knowledge gaps without requiring full-time hires across all functions.

Particularly valuable is the early integration of the commercial perspective — whether through full-time or fractional/part-time resources. This commercial input into early and late-stage development shapes clinical development strategies and helps maximize commercial success. By strategically deploying interim and on-demand leadership, organizations can simultaneously prioritize scientific rigor, commercial success, and capital efficiency — creating value while preserving runway.

Deployment Strategies and Best Practices

Maximizing the impact of interim leadership requires thoughtful implementation and clear expectations. We outline practical approaches for selecting, structuring, and integrating interim leaders to ensure their expertise translates into measurable clinical and business outcomes.



UNDERSTAND THE ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF INTERIM EXPERTISE

One of the key insights from industry experts is the dual nature of interim and on-demand roles. On the one hand, they offer budget flexibility and help companies avoid long-term commitments while providing access to industry experience to support medical, R&D, regulatory, and clinical operations initiatives and functions. On the other hand, costs can accumulate if consistent leadership is needed over extended periods.

The key to success lies in strategic implementation. It is essential to fully embed these interim and on-demand leaders within your internal teams and align their work with organizational objectives. This integration dramatically improves engagement success and maximizes the value of your investment in deployed expertise.

STRIKE THE RIGHT BALANCE: WHEN TO CHOOSE INTERIM LEADERSHIP

Identifying when to engage an interim or on-demand leader versus hiring a full-time employee is a critical component of an organization's broader talent strategy. This decision requires careful consideration of multiple factors: the required experience, cost, timing, scope, focus, and alignment with broader functional and organizational initiatives.

For example, bringing in an experienced scientist as an on-demand leader can be ideal for developing clinical protocols and trial recruitment strategies, particularly when they have specific experience launching products in your therapeutic area. This targeted approach allows companies to access senior-level expertise precisely when needed without the long-term commitment of a full-time hire.

IDENTIFY AND STRUCTURE EFFECTIVE INTERIM CMO SCENARIOS

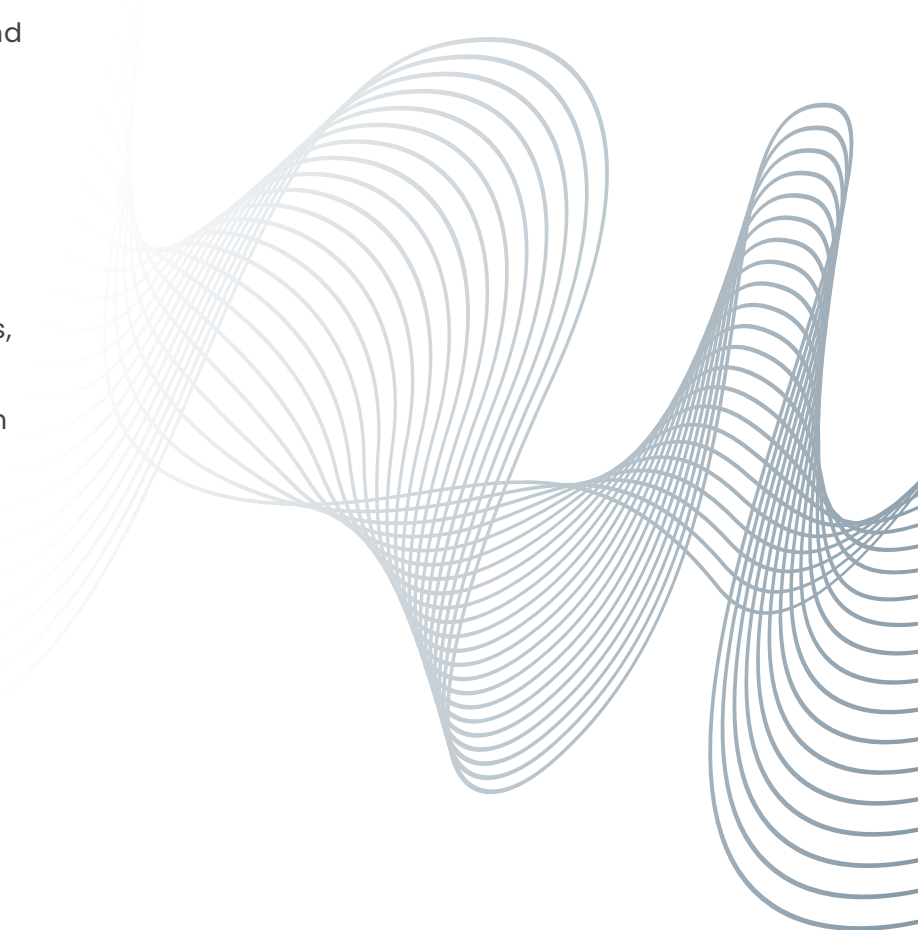
When partnering with a talent access firm like WittKieffer to identify specialized individuals for interim or on-demand roles, it's imperative to structure these positions effectively through collaborative expectation-setting discussions. The most successful biopharma companies maintain flexibility in their leadership structure, strategically blending in-house, interim, and on-demand talent based on their development stage and immediate priorities.

ENSURE RAPID IMPACT: ONBOARDING INTERIM LEADERS EFFECTIVELY

External leaders engaged on an interim or on-demand basis play a vital role in bridging expertise gaps within organizations, so their effective integration into the team is essential. When companies expect interim leaders to hit the ground running, clear communication on deliverables, scope, and timing is critical to setting mutual expectations. Additionally, both early and regular alignment of the role's scope, requirements, and definition of success should be prioritized between the interim leader, the company, and the talent access partner.

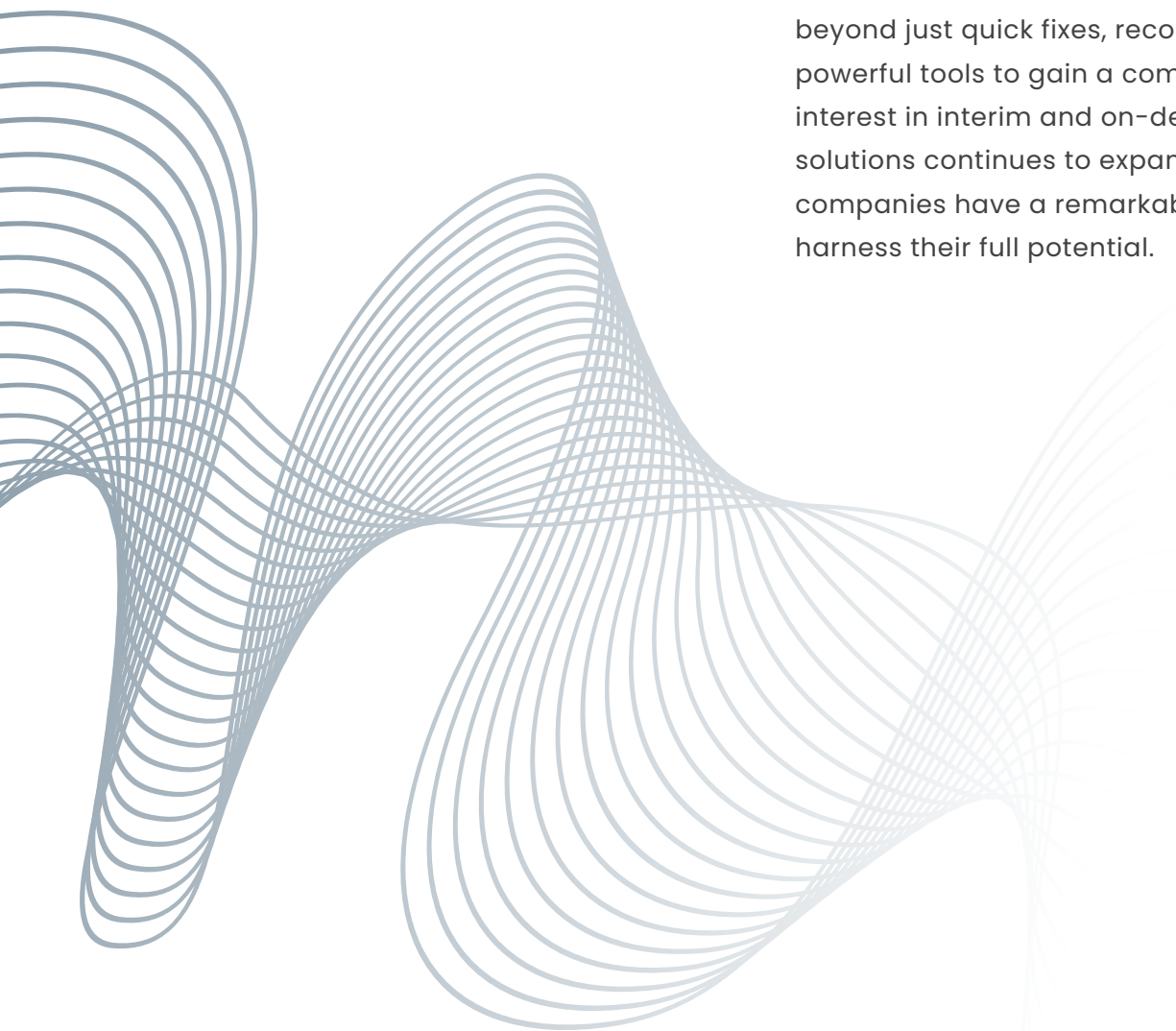
This alignment helps prevent potential issues such as scope creep or missed expectations that can undermine the value of interim leadership. This is especially important when bringing in an organization's first CMO or clinical leader, as first-time access to that expertise can quickly reshape the interim leader's role and engagement. Regular check-ins initiated by the company are critical for the success of interim CMOs, particularly for scientists who may be less familiar with the interim deployment of external talent.

By partnering with specialized talent access firms like WittKieffer, biopharma companies can identify and integrate the right interim leaders while ensuring alignment with organizational goals and culture, thus maximizing the impact of these strategic resources.



Various interim leadership models are driving significant advancements in the biopharma sector, offering budget flexibility, access to specialized expertise, and unique growth opportunities. While challenges related to retention, onboarding, and alignment must be navigated thoughtfully with the support of the right talent access firm, the rewards of having access to such talent when required are substantial for speeding up scientific and clinical development.

Top biopharma companies are now seeing the value in these flexible leadership models beyond just quick fixes, recognizing them as powerful tools to gain a competitive edge. As interest in interim and on-demand leadership solutions continues to expand and grow, companies have a remarkable opportunity to harness their full potential.



A Managing Director in WittKieffer's Interim Leadership solution, **GEORGE QUINN** relies upon an extensive background in executive talent, strategic consulting, and talent advisory to inform his work in client development for WittKieffer. A former scientist, natural communicator, and problem-solver, George is driven by his desire to identify creative leadership solutions for biopharma clients that align with their current and future strategic needs. He thoughtfully educates and partners with these organizations for opportunities to leverage interim and on-demand leadership talent, helping to fulfill their strategic objectives. George can be reached at: gquinn@wittkieffer.com.



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Improving Quality of Life
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ABOUT WITTKIEFFER – INTERIM LEADERSHIP AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES

Interim and on-demand leaders play a pivotal role in the healthcare and life sciences industries, offering rapid access and specialized expertise across the entire value chain. The significance of these leaders will continue to grow as organizations recognize their contributions to strategic agility and positive leadership impact.

Leadership advisory firms like WittKieffer, which blend industry expertise with seasoned talent advisors, are well-positioned to connect client organizations with effective interim and on-demand leaders, enabling them to fully leverage this evolving resource. WittKieffer takes pride in exclusively serving clients within the Quality of Life Ecosystem, which is dedicated to improving quality of life through impactful leadership deployed through executive search, interim and on-demand leadership, and leadership advisory solutions. For more information, please visit our Interim Leadership website or contact our Interim Leadership Solutions Leaders.