

The Talent Cliff.

Half your regulatory expertise is closer to retirement than your next product launch.

MARITZA BARRUOS · LONGEVITYBYDESIGNED.COM



COLUMN B · INDUSTRY SIGNAL · MEDTECH TRENDS

MedTech is facing a regulated-industry talent crisis. Here's what it's going to cost you.

Walk the floor of any established MedTech or regulated manufacturing company and ask a simple question: how many of your most experienced quality, regulatory, and operations leaders are within ten years of retirement? The answer, in most organizations, is quietly alarming. And the pipeline filling in behind them is not keeping pace.

This is not a future problem. It is a present one — and in a sector where institutional knowledge is directly tied to regulatory compliance, product safety, and audit readiness, the stakes of getting the talent transition wrong are unusually high. What makes the current moment distinctly more complex: artificial intelligence is reshaping the equation from both ends simultaneously.

“The organizations that will weather this transition aren’t the ones that hire fastest or automate most aggressively. They’re the ones that design deliberately for knowledge continuity in an environment where both people and technology are in motion.”

McKinsey research underscores the urgency: only 16% of executives report feeling comfortable with the specialized talent they have available, with 60% citing scarcity as a key inhibitor. In MedTech specifically, McKinsey’s analysis of R&D; functions found that spending is increasing at 10% per year while average time to market now exceeds four years. The Deloitte and Manufacturing Institute project that between 2018 and 2028, up to 2.4 million supply chain and manufacturing positions could remain unfilled, with a potential economic impact of \$2.5 trillion.

What the talent landscape is actually showing us

The retirement wave among senior RA, QA, and manufacturing leadership is accelerating — the cohort that built expertise under legacy FDA frameworks and holds hard-won regulatory relationships. EU MDR, FDA digital health frameworks, and the QMSR update (effective February 2026) all demand a more sophisticated profile from the next generation of leaders.

Meanwhile, the informal apprenticeship model — where you absorbed how a senior leader thought through a 483 response or a supplier CAPA by working alongside them — has been disrupted by remote work, flatter organizations, and faster job mobility. The result: a widening capability gap at precisely the moment organizations need depth.

AI SIGNAL

Greenlight Guru's 2025 MedTech Talent Reset analysis highlights a striking new dynamic: the talent market has swung from a "war for talent" to a market flooded with applicants — yet companies still struggle to find the right people. AI fluency is now one of the top three hiring priorities for life sciences leaders, with 19,000+ open AI/ML specialist positions and a 77% year-over-year increase in related job postings. At the same time, roles focused on manual tasks — data entry, protocol drafting, document review — are seeing reduced demand. The talent pool is large. The skills the market needs are concentrated in a very small slice of it.

Source: Greenlight Guru, "MedTech Talent Reset" (Dec. 2025); Manpower, "Talent Gap in AI: Life Sciences & Medtech" (2025)

The AI paradox: a tool that helps and a force that harms

Here is the tension that most executive teams have not yet resolved: AI is both an accelerant of the talent crisis and one of the most promising tools for managing it.

On the risk side, AI is quietly dismantling the entry-level career ladder that has historically built the next generation of regulated industry leaders. A 2025 Bloomberg analysis found that recent graduates are struggling to secure full-time work as AI absorbs routine tasks — documentation, data review, protocol drafting — that once served as the training ground for future QA managers and regulatory directors. The WEF's Future of Jobs Report projects that 40% of employers expect to reduce their workforce due to AI-driven automation.

The more insidious risk is what analysts call the "seniority cliff." Seniority is the accumulation of thousands of solved problems, crises navigated, and regulatory decisions made under pressure. If early-career professionals never grapple with those formative challenges because AI has absorbed them, the bench five to ten years from now will be thinner and more fragile than organizations currently realize.

Sources: Entrepreneur (Jan. 2026); WEF Future of Jobs Report 2025; Rezi.ai (Jan. 2026)

AI SIGNAL

On the opportunity side, AI knowledge management tools are emerging as a genuine solution to capturing institutional knowledge before it retires. APQC's 2026 predictions are direct: "AI is everywhere, but it's only as good as the knowledge it's built on." Organizations investing in structured knowledge assets — documents, lessons learned, expert interviews — are building the foundation for AI systems that surface that knowledge on demand. Gartner's 2025 research found that organizations with structured knowledge systems onboard new team members faster and maintain significantly higher performance consistency.

Sources: APQC, "2026 Knowledge Management Predictions" (Dec. 2025); Gartner enterprise KM research 2025

What executive teams need to do differently

McKinsey's latest MedTech R&D; research is clear: new capabilities and talent are needed to capture business value, and early movers will hold a significant advantage. HBR's succession research reinforces a critical finding: many internal candidates are underdeveloped, lacking enterprise-level stretch experiences needed to demonstrate readiness for the next role.

The organizations navigating this well are doing three things structurally — and AI changes the execution of each one:

First, making tacit knowledge explicit before it walks out the door. AI tools that generate first-draft SOPs from expert interviews, meeting recordings, or process walkthroughs can compress months of documentation work into days — provided organizations invest in the structured knowledge assets that make those tools useful.

Second, investing in mid-level leadership development at the Director and Senior Manager level now, not after promotion. The risk of over-automating entry-level roles is that it starves this pipeline. Organizations thinking ahead are redesigning those roles to preserve the developmental experience — judgment-building, regulatory reasoning, stakeholder navigation — while letting AI absorb the truly repetitive tasks.

Third, redefining what "qualified" means in a constrained market. AI fluency is now a non-negotiable competency for quality, regulatory, and operations roles in MedTech — not as a replacement for domain expertise, but as a multiplier of it. The candidates who understand both the regulatory environment and how to work effectively with AI are becoming the most valuable people in the market. There are not many of them yet.

Sources: HBR, "The Pitfalls That Undermine CEO Succession Planning" (Nov. 2025); HBR, "Building Your Organization's Next Generation of Leaders" (Aug. 2025)

One question to carry this week:

If three of your most experienced leaders retired this year, what would your organization lose that isn't written down anywhere — and what is your plan to change that?

The organizations that get ahead of this transition will not do it by accident. They will do it by design.

Maritza Barruos

Founder & President, Longevity by Designed LLC

mbp@longevitybydesigned.com · www.longevitybydesigned.com · 619-907-0737

Designed to Lead · Longevity by Designed LLC · People. Leadership. Design. Success.