

# New Student Guide to Preparing for a Career in Specialty Pharmacy

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So, you're a new student pharmacist who is interested in a career in specialty pharmacy. There are a multitude of reasons you may come to this decision. Maybe you want to work with orphan drugs, which carry mechanisms that are complex and unique.

Perhaps you are excited by the potential for growth and see specialty pharmacy as an exciting career opportunity. You could also have been drawn in by the chance to work with patient populations who have rare diseases that often utilize these services.

You might even know someone who works in specialty pharmacy who sparked your interest. Specialty is among the fastest growing areas of the pharmacy industry, after all. This raises the question, how do you make yourself a good candidate for a specialty career?

As an aspiring specialty pharmacist, there are a multitude of steps you can take to prepare yourself. Pharmacy schools are filled with opportunities to grow, network, and differentiate yourself. By engaging in some of the following activities, you'll be well on your way to transforming yourself into an ideal candidate.

## **Work Experience**

To start off, one of the best things you can do is gain work experience while you are in school. It isn't just hospitals and retail stores that employ students as interns—there are positions in the specialty world, too. A good first step is to check for specialty pharmacies around your area. Once you've made a list, check their websites to see if they have a career section or an area to submit an application. They may have postings for internship positions on their website or listed on job search sites.

An internship within a specialty setting will provide students a wide range of experiences, including exposure to specific products only seen in this area of practice, a chance to

observe the high-touch monitoring and clinical information that specialty pharmacies provide, an overview of how reimbursement works within this specific space, and an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the day-to-day workflow in all areas of a specialty pharmacy.

Make sure your resume is polished before reaching out to these companies. For those who are interested in optimizing their resume, most universities have an office of career services.

This is a great resource to gain feedback and improve your resume. You may even have a faculty mentor or an upper classman review. Don't hesitate to ask them to look over your resume, they may be able to give you more specialized tips than the career services office, who are not practicing in the field of pharmacy.

If specialty pharmacies in your area don't have any jobs listed online, reach out to their leadership directly and ask if there are any available intern positions. You never know if an opportunity will arise.

Another available option is the Academy of Managed Care Pharmacists (AMCP), who offers a 10-week sponsored program through the AMCP Foundation. While this is not directly in a specialty pharmacy, it may allow exposure to many of the high cost medications and how they are managed. It is important to remember that not only is an internship a great way to gain experience, but also a way to start building your network of contacts.

## **Networking**

Building connections is among the most important things you can do during your time in pharmacy school. A great resource for networking opportunities is to join your pharmacy school's chapter of AMCP.

This organization encompasses all aspects of managed care and includes many individuals in the specialty industry. If your school for some reason does not have a local chapter on campus, now is a great opportunity to start one.

The benefits of AMCP membership are numerous. You can add leadership positions to your resume by becoming a student officer for your campus' local chapter. For those looking for even more experience, you can volunteer to work as a member of AMCP's national committees, a number of which include student representatives. You can check the AMCP website for the available committee slots, requirements, and instructions on how to apply.

The AMCP also has national conferences with the AMCP Annual Meeting occurring every March-April, and the AMCP Nexus Meeting held in the fall, which are terrific places to network with pharmacy leaders from all over the country. Even more interesting for students, the AMCP holds a yearly P&T competition with AMCP student members competing at local level before potentially moving on to the national finals.

The final competition occurs at the AMCP Annual Meeting. For those who are interested in interfacing and networking on a more regional level, the AMCP also has numerous regional and state chapters, including Georgia AMCP, Midwest Region AMCP, Northeast Region AMCP, Northwest Region AMCP, Ohio-Kentucky AMCP, Southwest Region AMCP, and Utah AMCP.

These localized branches include even more opportunities for students to meet and connect with pharmacists in the specialty world. As each region's schedule is different, you can check their websites for a listing of their meetings and events.

Other organizations more focused on the specialty world outside of AMCP do exist, with the National Association of Specialty Pharmacy (NASP) Annual Meeting and Educational Conference held September 18 to 20, 2017, and Asembia's annual Specialty Pharmacy Summit, which was held earlier this month.

While both organizations have typically less student involvement and lack the campus chapter structure of AMCP, their meetings and conferences still present students with unique opportunities to interface and make connections with people throughout the industry. The advantages these organizations offer are a specific focus toward the specialty world, giving students a chance to meet and talk with even more leaders in the specialty pharmacy industry specifically.

#### **Advanced Practice (APPE) Rotations**

For those about to head into their last year of pharmacy school, there are even more opportunities to continue your development. Most students will have the option to select at least one or two elective rotation sites during their APPE year.

Talk with your school's experiential staff about the potential for elective rotations in the specialty field. Rotations will provide you with an introduction to aspects of specialty pharmacy that you may not even see at your normal internship site.

This includes exposure to workflow management, medications not found in other practice settings, clinical management of these complex disease states, and insurance concerns with these products. As such, advanced practice rotations are another great way to further get your name out into the specialty world.

Some students may also have a part of the year set aside for research or independent study during the professional phases of the curriculum. You may want to seek out faculty members of your school who have experience in the specialty field, and ask if they have any opportunities you could use to fill this rotation block.

This research can also be submitted and presented at some of the national meetings listed above. Research experience looks great on a resume and is a mechanism to differentiate yourself from other candidates.

#### **Post-Graduate Preparation**

If you are interested in pursuing a residency or fellowship post-graduation you're in luck. There are specialty residencies and fellowships available.

For those who want to learn more about these opportunities, the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists

(ASHP) and AMCP both hold residency showcases where specialty pharmacy programs appear. The ASHP residency showcase is held each December during their midyear meeting in Orlando.

Examples of programs listed include University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics PGY1&2 combined program, Aurora Specialty pharmacy PGY1, Avella Specialty Pharmacy PGY1, CVS Health Specialty Division PGY1, and Walgreens Specialty Pharmacy/Duquesne University PGY1.

AMCP's residency showcase is held during their yearly Nexus meeting, which occurs in the fall each year. Examples of programs listed with AMCP include Highmark PGY1, OptumRx PGY1, and Marshfield Pharmacy PGY1, which have specific specialty components to their broader managed care programs.

While there are less programs available than more traditional areas of pharmacy, new opportunities are occurring each year, so keep an eye out. Fellowship opportunities are also beginning to be offered with PANTHERx Specialty Pharmacy in Pittsburgh, which initiated a fellowship program in 2017.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the amount of ways you can engage in the specialty world as a student are numerous. There are a multitude of opportunities to both build your network and a strong resume. By keeping yourself engaged and active during your time in pharmacy school, you have the chance to make important connections, and gain valuable experience that can help you achieve your goals.

### **About the Authors**

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