

Finding your first job

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Tracey Gaughan, a rotational basic grade pharmacist at University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust, did her prereg at Bedford Hospital and qualified in August 2002. "I knew I wanted to stay in hospital and had the option of staying on at Bedford, but I wanted to go to a big teaching hospital so that I could experience more variety and have more choice as to what to specialise in," she explained.

So how do you decide which hospital is the one for you?

"Most hospital pharmacy departments have websites you can look at," says Tracey. And other pharmacists should be able to tell you what they think about a hospital.

Tracey found a vacancy that interested her, advertised in *The Pharmaceutical Journal*. She telephoned the hospital for the application form and job description and was eventually invited for a 40-minute interview. Tracey was asked what she wanted to get out of her training. She also remembers being asked about the "Spoonful of Sugar" audit commission report focusing on hospital pharmaceutical services. The interview was a success and she started work as a B grade pharmacist immediately after completing her preregistration year.

Many trainees find that by the time they get on the register, their finances are in a sad state. And it is well known that newly qualified hospital pharmacists are paid less than those in community pharmacy. Tracey decided to supplement her income by joining a locum agency. Although she had some community experience during her prereg, at first, she asked the agency to send her to quieter pharmacies, preferably with a dispenser. "As long as the staff are quite well trained, it's relatively easy," she says.

Tracey is due to start her clinical diploma in January 2003. Her advice is: "Don't worry, because there are so many hospital jobs out there."

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What about those who do their prereg in community? Community pharmacist Sangita Manek qualified in 2002, after prereg training with Boots The Chemists. "During my prereg, I started talking to other people, such as locums and reliefs, to see how they found their work" she said. On qualifying, Sangita was offered a job as a relief pharmacist with Boots, but didn't like travelling. Eventually, she was able to negotiate a three-day a week contract, leaving her time to locum elsewhere. "After qualifying, I found it easy to tailor my working life to my requirements," she said.

Doing your training with a multiple often has the advantage of being offered a job afterwards. Things are not always so easy in independent pharmacies where there is only room for one pharmacist. Hansha Bhudia completed her prereg in an independent pharmacy in Paddington, London, in 1998. "After qualifying, rather than looking for employment, I started locuming to experience different environments. I didn't want to get bogged down in one place," she said.

Hansha joined three or four locum agencies that she found advertised in the *PJ*. "Initially, there was a problem with the agencies not being able to find me enough work, but from that December, I worked constantly," she said. "I was trained in a tough area, so I felt confident and prepared to locum straight away."

Hansha now owns her own pharmacy in East London: "Locuming helped me a lot in setting up my own business. You learn so many different approaches by working in different places, and that has been to my advantage."

New pharmacists are registering in a climate in which work is available. However, this situation may not last forever. Whatever you choose to do after qualifying, be it starting your career as a pharmacist straight away or taking a new or slightly different path, start to think about what you want to do early on. Talk to as many people as possible, about what they do and how they got there. ✕