

For personal use only. Not to be reproduced without permission of the editor
(permissions@pharmj.org.uk)

Community prereg training — you get out of the year what you put in

Anita Patel is working as a
locum community
pharmacist

Deciding where to do your preregistration training can be difficult. You will need to make a decision regarding the branch of the profession in which you want to undertake your training. This will, in turn, encourage you to be more focused on your application procedure and should save time for both you and the company or organisation.

Selecting an employer

When selecting a potential employer, there are a number of points to consider. These will include, for community and hospital pharmacy, the type of services the pharmacy provides and the potential for involvement in these services. Visit the pharmacy before making an application. If this is not possible, ensure you arrange a visit before accepting an offer of employment. Remember, you will be spending a year working there, so you need to be sure you are happy with your choice. The visit will not only give you a chance to see the premise but also to meet the manager, your prospective tutor and colleagues.

After undertaking summer placements in both community and hospital pharmacy, I decided that I wanted to pursue a career in

community pharmacy. I chose to undertake my preregistration year with Boots The Chemists and started the year at a busy town centre store in Richmond, west London. My first few months of training were spent learning the basics, finding my way around the dispensary and becoming familiar with drug names. I quickly adapted to my new surroundings, which was made easier by the support I received from the large dispensary team. I was also fortunate to have another preregistration trainee working in the same store, so we were able to share experiences and support each other's training.

Dispensary work

As a preregistration trainee, my time was split between the dispensary and the counter. The store had a busy dispensing business, and I was involved in receiving, reviewing and preparing prescriptions, as well as providing counselling and advice to patients on the proper use of their medicines.

Working on the counter involved offering help and advice to customers on a variety of topics such as coughs and colds, skin conditions, malaria prophylaxis and smoking cessation, all of which gave me the opportunity to practise my over-the-counter counselling skills. I was also involved in the prescription collection service the store offered, and regularly visited the local surgeries in the area.

I had regular meetings with my tutor, so we could discuss my progress, address any concerns, and highlight areas that I needed to focus on to achieve the performance standards set out by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society.

For reasons beyond my control, half-way through the year, I was relocated to another store and completed my training in Twickenham. Initially, the change was difficult. The store was under-staffed, which meant that I felt as if I was managing the dispensary almost single-handedly. Although, at first, I found this challenging, my new tutor was patient and offered me a lot of support.

Clinical training

Clinical training for all Boots' preregistration trainees was provided

throughout the year. Topics included the cardiovascular system, the central nervous system, diabetes and men's and women's health. Training also included sessions on improving communication skills, giving and receiving feedback, dealing with conflict and how to be more assertive. There were also workshops on the Drug Tariff and preparation for the registration examination. I found these training days most useful. They offered me the chance to meet other preregistration trainees in the area to share experiences and discuss any concerns.

During the middle of my year, I spent a month working at a local hospital, enabling me to get an insight into what is involved in pharmacy there. Although I had worked in a hospital setting before, I found this was useful for the registration exam.

The dreaded exam

The grand finale of the year is the registration exam. You will need to work consistently throughout the year. It is important that from the beginning you organise your time effectively so as to obtain the best out of the 12 months. I found it useful to agree training time with my tutor each week. Ask your tutor for regular feedback so you can monitor your progress. Familiarise yourself with the British National Formulary, the Society's 'Medicines, ethics and practice' guide and the Drug Tariff early in the year and ensure you practise calculation questions regularly so if you have any problems you can sort them out before the exam.

There is no correct answer as to which is the best sector to train in. The year is determined by what you put in to it. It is important to decide at the start what you want to get out of the year and work towards achieving that goal. My advice to preregistration trainees who are starting out the year is to stick at it. It is hard at first when your feet hurt because you have been standing all day and you feel you know nothing — but the year flies by before you know it. Always remember that there are lots of people you can ask for help, starting with your tutor. And finally, don't forget to have fun! 🐾