

Applying for your prereg

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Thinking ahead is hard when you are at university. However, if you are in your third year, you have an important decision to make — that is, selecting the correct preregistration placement. Make sure you think carefully about which placement you choose because it could affect your entire future pharmacy career. There are several different types of placement. The main ones are described below.

Community

As you will all know a community placement means working with the general public in primary care. You should receive presentations and talks that are organised by your school of pharmacy from different companies offering preregistration places. Go to all of them and take all the literature you can about each company. Speak to the representatives to find out more about the companies and to make a good first impression. Learn about the training as well as any other benefits that you may receive. The information you get may be useful for your interviews, so make notes.

Hospital

The NHS scheme for England and Wales means that a student can only apply to four hospital places and the application is web-based. Remember that if you have some idea of where you would

like to work before applying, see if you can get a tour of the facility or even some work experience there beforehand to make sure that you have selected the right place.

Six-month split placements

Unless you are on a sandwich course split placements are not particularly common. They do give the student an opportunity to see more than one area of practice. Split placements can be arranged for areas such as hospital, community, industry and in some cases academia or primary care. You must make sure, however, that you apply quickly to stand the best chance of getting one of these places. Be proactive, do not wait for the information to come to you.

Applying for a placement

As soon as you can, make sure you note all the deadlines for the community sector. Most range from the end of May to the end of June, but do not wait that long. Send in your application early so that it shows the company you are keen to get the job.

Hospital sector deadlines are usually the end of August but fill in your application form before this because you need to have input from referees. If you leave it until the summer holiday, you may not get hold of them.

Before writing out your final application ask someone to proof read it. It may sound obvious but make sure that you follow the instructions on the form (if it says write in black ink, do so). Before you send it off, make a photocopy of it so that you can look at it before the interview.

If you are asked which location you wish to work in, be honest and if you do not mind, say so. Employers do not want robots. They want free-thinking people who are going to be happy in their placement.

After hospital interviews, many regions pool any rejections and offer the applicants to alternative hospitals. Therefore, unless you are sure of which region you want to work in, apply to places in more than one so that more hospitals can consider your application if you are unsuccessful the first time around.

Preparation for the interview

Before your interview, keep abreast of current issues affecting the profession in your chosen sector but also in other sectors. Good places to find this information are *The Pharmaceutical Journal*, *Tomorrow's Pharmacist*, *Future Pharmacist* and the internet.

Read through your copy of the application form and any other information that you have collected. If you need to travel to get there, give yourself lots of time and keep the contact number handy in case you get delayed.

When you are asked a question, think about it and construct your answer before speaking. If you have any hobbies or experiences that you think may be of interest to the interviewer, try to weave them into your answer.

The interviewer will most likely give you the opportunity to ask questions at the end, so make sure that you have a couple of them prepared. Try to ask them something that has not already been covered during your interview. Do not ask about the salary.

When you are offered a place, you may not be given much time to think about it before you have to decide. Consider whether you want the job and whether you think that you could work in that environment for at least 12 months.

If you do not get your chosen placement first time around, do not panic. Your school of pharmacy should have a list of local community pharmacies that still have places available. The hospital scheme has a clearing system to help as well.

Finally

The most important piece of advice I can give you is to be yourself. Do not lie on the application form because you may get caught out at the interview. It saves a lot of embarrassment and, hey, surely you want to be employed on your merits? Also, stay calm. Remember, there is competition for places but if you have prepared for the interview, it will show.

May I wish you all success with your applications. ✂