

Training in the industry

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I left Ireland to study pharmacy at the Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, expecting to return home after qualifying and work as a community pharmacist. Therefore, finding myself working for Pfizer as a preregistration trainee was an interesting twist.

I had worked in community pharmacies before starting my degree and had a part-time job while studying. My first work experience in industry was at the end of the third year when I got an eight-week summer placement. This opened my eyes to the immense opportunities that industry has to offer and fuelled my enthusiasm for a career in this area. I immediately set about applying to every registered industry premises for a preregistration position but, unfortunately, there are not many companies participating in the scheme. However, your preregistration tutor at university should be able to point you in the right direction, or you can contact the Industrial Pharmacists Group at the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, which should be able to assist. Your university might also arrange presentations on the industry by visiting industrial pharmacists and, if so, use this opportunity to ask as many questions as you can. There is competition for these places but remember, the only way you can be sure you will not get a place in industry is if you do not apply.

The industrial preregistration scheme is an excellent opportunity since industry is an area of practice in which it is not so easy to gain experience. Most students

are based in the formulation design area, which tends to be one of the traditional areas of entry for pharmacists in the industry. However the structure of the placement is varied allowing an insight into several career areas over the course of the six months.

I accepted a placement offered by Pfizer, which involved six months in a general hospital and the other six months at its European Research and Development headquarters in Sandwich, Kent.

Hospital placement

My placement began with six months at the Kent and Canterbury Hospital in Canterbury. Having only six months in the hospital sector does make this portion of the training intensive and it is important to use this time wisely so that you are well prepared clinically for the registration examination. Of course the hospital is familiar with hospital/industry split preregistration trainees and adapts the rotations accordingly so that every area is covered, albeit in a shorter period.

Throughout the year there were training sessions organised by the hospital which were also attended by other preregistration trainees based in the area. This meant that during the hospital placement I had the opportunity to meet regularly with other industry preregistration trainees (who were currently completing the industry section). This gave us all the chance to share experiences and I was able to find out some details about what to expect for the second six months in industry, and vice versa.

Industry placement

Industry is something which is hard to comprehend unless you experience it first hand. First, it is not full of mad scientists who do not know how to enjoy themselves — in fact I was pleasantly surprised to find a social committee in the department. There was a good mix of industrial placement (sandwich science degree) students and new graduates working alongside the preregistration trainees. And, secondly, although the work might be challenging, especially initially, there is plenty of support from your team ensuring that you do not feel like you are expected to know everything. Instead, the role allows

you to put some of that pharmaceutical sciences theory into practice as you grow and develop in confidence.

My time at Pfizer was spent in a liquids formulation team looking at gel behaviour. This was project-based work during which I gained knowledge in rheology, dissolution testing and analytical methods. The work allowed me to learn more about the regulatory requirements of licensing bodies such as the US Food and Drug Administration and the UK Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, and also what it is like to work as part of a team. The results of my work were presented to other members of the department at the end of my placement, giving me an opportunity to hone my communication skills.

In addition to project work, I also gained an excellent insight into future career options since the industry training is, like hospital training, rotational. Time is allocated to the good manufacturing practice area (both solids and liquids manufacture), clinical trial supplies, quality assurance and regulatory affairs. Short visits are arranged to other departments to meet pharmacists working in other, less traditional, areas ensuring that you finish the preregistration year with a much better understanding of the drug development process: from drug discovery through to manufacture. You quickly come to realise that one of the advantages of a career in industry is that opportunities exist for moving into roles in different areas thus making it a satisfying career option for pharmacists. This enables many industrial pharmacists to build their skills and knowledge base through experience gained in different strategies.

Do not give up

If, however, you do not get the opportunity to work in industry either as a summer student or a preregistration trainee, I would advise you not to give up and to apply after registering if you are interested in this area. Many of the pharmacists I met during my preregistration year completed their training in either hospital or community pharmacy and now have successful careers in the pharmaceutical industry. ✕