

Your first job: who offers what?

Once you have decided in which sector you want to work, choosing who to work for is the next big decision. Debbie Andalo finds out who offers what

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Newly qualified pharmacists are joining the profession as it faces its most significant changes in a generation. The Government is determined to bring community pharmacists out of the dispensary and develop their clinical role and influence. The new contract (p60), which will be implemented in England and Wales in April 2005 and in Scotland in April 2006, will create opportunities for innovation. Hospital and primary care pharmacists have a new pay system, Agenda for Change (p62), which will allow them to work towards more challenging and better paid jobs. Clinical responsibilities are increasing for all pharmacists as they take on the authority



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to prescribe drugs as supplementary prescribers.

Organisations and individuals at the forefront of pharmacy training and recruitment agree that it is an exciting time to become a pharmacist. Sukhjit Grewal, assistant head of education and training at the National Pharmaceutical Association, which represents community pharmacies, says: "There has never been a better time to become a pharmacist simply because of what is happening with the new contract as people with innovation will be providing new services. The profession is moving away from dispensing and, as far as new challenges are concerned, it's probably the best time to join the profession." Hospital pharmacist David Scott, who is responsible for the annual Department of Health hospital pharmacy recruitment survey, agrees. He says: "There is plenty of scope and job opportunities at the moment. It is quite good to develop a career today because there is a lot of movement in the sector with about 20 per cent of hospital pharmacists changing hospital in a year."

CPD opportunities

In the current climate of change, community pharmacies and the NPA are increasing the continuing

professional development opportunities for new pharmacists. This spring the NPA is running a series of education weekends for preregistration trainees which will cover issues such as legal indemnity and chemical hazards. Mr Grewal says: "The weekends are targeted at independent pharmacists who [have trainees] but don't have the resources or the tutors which the bigger pharmacy companies have to run courses." The education weekends will be additional to the NPA preregistration open days, which focus on topical professional issues. Mr Grewal says: "The open days are about showing them that preregistration is about more than just passing an examination."

The NPA also has educational material aimed at newly qualified community pharmacists, including interactive CD-ROMS that explain the complexities of the Drug Tariff and pharmacy law and ethics. Hard copies are also available. Mr Grewal says: "These are essentially guides. It's about what they need to do in community pharmacy which isn't done as comprehensively in their preregistration year." The NPA also produces a book, 'Communicate', for the graduate and preregistration market, which gives advice about how to develop interpersonal skills.

Individual pharmacy organisations are also developing the continuing professional support they give to preregistration trainees and newly qualified pharmacists. This year the large multiple, Moss Pharmacy, is launching a management development programme for its preregistration trainees, which will cover basic management skills including working with people. The initiative builds upon the existing system where Moss preregistration trainees are trained in management skills in the final month of their training.

Community pharmacy

The majority of trainees completing their preregistration year who want to become community pharmacists will begin their career as a relief manager while they build up confidence and experience. Working for Rowlands Pharmacy for example, a relief manager could expect to earn around £31,000. Karen Wakefield, who is involved in pharmacy recruitment for the company, said: "Towards the end of the preregistration year myself and the area manager will meet with the preregistration trainees to discuss their future and their plans, and whether they want to stay with Rowlands. If they want to stay with us and we are happy with their performance in the year we would offer them a relief manager role, or a pharmacy manager role depending on their ability and whether they are ready to go down this route."

Acting head of human resources at Moss Pharmacy, David Cooper, says the majority of its preregistration trainees will join as relief pharmacists for a minimum of three months. They will work across a geographical area in a similar way to a locum by providing holiday and other cover for pharmacists. Mr Cooper says this is a popular route for preregistration trainees to follow. "The system allows the pharmacist to match his or her increasing confidence with the new qualification. It offers them all the benefits of being a locum but also the benefits of continuous employment and a salary."

Professional support and training for new Moss pharmacists in these early days comes via a network of training managers who are available at the end of a telephone. They are also given a company manual and

guide to support their continuing professional development. Rowlands Pharmacy also takes its continuing professional development responsibilities seriously and offers its new pharmacists sponsorship to go on to study for additional qualifications such as a clinical diploma in community pharmacy. Ms Wakefield adds: "We look at each individual need and offer support, coaching and training to develop them into quality pharmacy managers within our team."

Large multiple Boots The Chemists has 450 preregistration trainees this year and another 416 who have just finished their registration examination, of which 98 per cent have decided to work for Boots. A new pharmacist, earning about £30,000, will spend around six months in a pharmacy as the second pharmacist before taking on more responsibility and could become a pharmacy manager at a small store within the first 12 months. Future career options are varied within the company, including specialising in regulation and governance or pharmacy recruitment or becoming a senior manager liaising with the primary care trust to develop pharmacy initiatives locally and nationally. Paul Stretton, company HR manager for health care professionals, including pharmacists, says: "I think with Boots you can get the job that you want it to be." The company invests heavily in continuing professional development and offers a modular-based programme which it is hoping to get accredited as a postgraduate diploma.

Hospital pharmacy

Opportunities for further study are also traditionally available to pharmacists who start their career in the hospital sector. David Scott, regional training pharmacist for Thames Valley, says most new pharmacists will have the chance to study for a master's degree as part of their continuing professional development. He says: "Almost everybody is expected to work through some kind of post qualifying qualification if they come into hospital pharmacy — it's almost a universal path. I think without that extra qualification there are fewer opportunities to progress in hospital pharmacy."

He says that although new hospital pharmacists may start their careers on a lower salary than their colleagues in

community pharmacy, career progression is steady and within 10 years they could be earning £40,000. He says: "If they go on to become a chief pharmacist they could earn around £50,000. And some chief pharmacists at some of the very large hospitals can be on a par with a consultant salary, which is around £80,000 plus."

Dr Scott recommends a career in hospital pharmacy because it offers flexible working and there are advantages in being in a large organisation where career options are varied. There are also financial benefits. He says: "The NHS still has one of the best pension schemes in the country and it is still a final salary scheme." But he also believes there are greater professional rewards in the hospital sector compared with the community. He says: "I would choose hospital over community because you are working continually with patients who are very ill and who need medical care. There are also a whole range of areas which you can get involved in, such as quality assurance or intravenous preparations as well as a large number of clinical areas. It is possible today to sample a number of different areas and develop skills and then decide which specialty you wish to pursue."

Primary care pharmacy

The new generation of pharmacists who are hoping to launch their career in primary care will be disappointed. Although career opportunities for new pharmacists in the hospital sector are well established, it is not the same picture in primary care, where openings traditionally exist for more experienced pharmacists with a community and hospital background. Sue Carter, chairman of the Primary Care Pharmacists Association and head of prescribing and pharmacy and pharmaceutical adviser for Adur, Arun and Worthing PCT, has advice for new pharmacists keen to work for a PCT or a GP practice. She says: "If you find it interesting try to get some experience during your preregistration year. Then think about getting experience in community pharmacy and hospital pharmacy — develop your career first before making your move into primary care. It's a really exciting place to be but you need to build that depth of experience first." ❧