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# A day in the life of an industrial pharmacist: two perspectives

In this article, two industrial pharmacists give a flavour of what it is like to work in the pharmaceutical industry

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**F**ulfilling, fascinating and fun are a few of the words I would use to describe my job as an industrial pharmacist. I could easily continue with other terms that evoke optimism and satisfaction but, as you read on, you will understand why there just is not the need.

As is often the case in finding an enjoyable career, mine began with me being in the right place at the right time. Before I embarked upon the third year of the MPharm course, I attended a pharmacy conference where I met other industrial pharmacists. This was my first insight into the pharmaceutical industry and having already acquired community and hospital experience, I thought I would give industry a go. The following summer I secured a placement at Pfizer and it was this snapshot of the ever growing and changing industrial landscape of pharmaceuticals that totally embraced me. Immediately after registration, I obtained a full-time post in pharmaceutical research and

industrial pharmacy



development with Pfizer, and I have now been here for a year.

## The day begins . . .

**M**y day begins roughly when I want it to, thanks to flexible working hours. I opt to start at 8.30am and use the next half hour to check e-mail, voice-mail, post and diary to see what I have booked in for the day ahead. Each day varies, which makes describing “a day in my life” difficult, but it is this diversity, in addition to the fast-pace that makes the day whizz by.

## Meetings...

**I** normally have my first meeting at 9.30am and this could be with my team, department or multidisciplinary groups composed of chemists, biologists, toxicologists or external visitors from academia or industry. Meetings currently account for approximately a third of my time and can take place anytime throughout the day. The way I manage

the rest of my time is up to me, so effective time management is certainly a bonus.

### My own time . . .

I spend the rest of my time completing duties and responsibilities that are “assigned” to me at the start of the year. I have used “assigned” loosely since although my manager sets these, as an individual I can contribute significantly to them. Furthermore, attaining goals and writing personal development plans to include career aspirations are greatly encouraged.

My current role in generating quality biopharmaceutics data to help guide compounds in discovery through to early development requires me to divide time between various activities. These include conducting laboratory work, writing documents and presentations, responding to e-mails, reading articles and generally keeping up to date with everything.

My role is varied, challenging and professionally fulfilling. Industrial pharmacy offers a wide choice of career structure no matter what area you join, including clinical trials departments, drug information, regulatory affairs or marketing. Whatever takes your fancy, the industry has lots to offer.

I am thrilled to be part of this industry and look forward with excitement to the rest of my career. — *Sonia Patel*

**B**efore starting on a description of my working day, it is important that it is placed into the context of my overall career. I started working in community pharmacy and after my preregistration year, I moved into the hospital service. While in the hospital service, I had the opportunity to work overseas and to develop an interest in computers. Armed with this background I embarked on my career in the pharmaceutical industry.

In the industry, you are employed for what you know, what you do and how well you perform. There is no shortage of graduates to work in the industry and in the UK there is no job in the industry that

is the monopoly of a registered pharmacist. This is not true in other parts of the world.

### Long and medium term projects

The working day consists of several strands. First, there are long and medium term projects, which are planned and have milestones that have to be met. The major ones at the moment are the upgrade of the pharmacovigilance system. This includes the review of our systems and the rewriting of standard operating procedures. As with most projects within the industry, multidisciplinary teamwork is essential. This involves negotiation for resources from departments as diverse as quality assurance, telephony, security and information technology. Since the pharmacovigilance system is global, it involves links with our businesses in the rest of the world and even some of our business partners. Added to this list are the specialised agencies that we use and, where expertise is not readily available, negotiation with new service suppliers to bridge the gaps.

### Routine work and emergencies

Much of the rest of the day is taken up with routine work and “emergencies”. Routine work involves keeping up to date with what is happening in the pharmaceutical arena in the UK, the US and Europe. This is done by e-mail correspondence, viewing the internet and reading several publications. There is so much information that it is necessary to scan journals and magazines. The need for quick, critical assessment is paramount and I find those articles which I think “that might be interesting” seldom get read.

### Ad hoc requests

The final area covered is the ad hoc requests. These arrive, usually unsolicited, via e-mail, telephone or with a colleague. My interest in computing means I am asked several times a day to solve computer problems.

My background in hospital and community pharmacy means I am used as a sounding board by the marketing department for their latest ideas. This is



usually after the project has been approved and sometime after it has been launched.

My pharmacy and computer skills are brought together when it comes to talking to the suppliers of the computer software for GPs and pharmacists. I am also called upon to supply information on the British National Formulary and the Drug Tariff to various departments in the business. Then there is replying to correspondence from outside the business.

### Teamwork

It would be churlish to let you believe that I do all this on my own, or that my role has consisted of this since I entered the industry. I have a great team that I manage on a day-to-day basis. This is what gives me a great buzz about working in the industry. The job is never the same two days running — you develop your own career path and the people you work with bring many different skills. It may mean that a pharmacy degree does not give you the security of a job, but it forms a great basis for the work. — *Mel Smith*