

superintendent pharmacist

Advice from a superintendent pharmacist: aim beyond your reach



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Pradip Patel is superintendent pharmacist for Boots The Chemists. Dawn Connelly finds out how he reached this position, what it involves and what some of the benefits are of working for Boots

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The best way to develop your career is to deliver stunning results — whatever job you are in . . . always aim beyond your reach. This is the first piece of advice that Pradip Patel, superintendent pharmacist at Boots The Chemists, has to offer pharmacy students. The second is for them to continue to develop themselves: to learn new things in terms of knowledge, skills and behaviours, and to broaden their horizons by learning outside their profession. “That is your best passport to a successful future,” he advises. A closer look at Pradip’s career proves that this is valuable advice.

Pradip has had a remarkably varied working life since he graduated from the London School of Pharmacy in 1976. But one thing has been constant: his commitment to Boots. He began his career as a preregistration trainee with the company and, once registered, he moved on to manage both small and large stores in a number of locations. After 14 years as store manager, he changed direction and became

marketing manager for home and leisure, based at Boots’s head office in Nottingham. Although this appeared to be taking him away from pharmacy, it was all part of a career plan to gain central experience of how products are purchased, supplied and marketed. “My dream was always to take a senior role in the field, the area manager role. I had all the experience in the stores but what I didn’t have was central experience,” he explains. The marketing role allowed him to fill this gap in his knowledge and skills, which he knew would benefit him when he moved on to take over an area.

After five successful years as an area manager Pradip headed back to head office where he took up a post in the property and planning department. This department is responsible for designing, building and maintaining all buildings in Boots The Chemists, and this is where his people skills came into play. His role was to paint a vision of what an ideal store would be like and to help realise this vision and create stores that are great places to shop and work.

He then moved on to be director of stores for Boots Opticians. His remit here was to maximise the profitability of the business by delivering the Boots Opticians "customer offer" in all 300 stores. He saw his role as one of leadership. "It is about providing people with a vision and working with them to develop the plans to deliver that vision," he explained. "If you have people who are fired up and can't wait to get to work because they enjoy work so much, then the rest will automatically follow." His philosophy is that happy people make for happy customers and happy customers mean business success.

After six years away from pharmacy, Pradip returned to be regional general manager for London, before moving into his current role as superintendent pharmacist six months ago.

Pradip's vision

It is a brilliant time to land the job, he says. "Pharmacy is about to change tremendously. There is a new contract, electronic transmission of prescriptions is around the corner, continuing professional development is here. There is a greater emphasis from the Government on public health . . . at Boots we are going to ensure that pharmacy takes this unique opportunity to make a major step change."

Pradip explains from a personal perspective what he believes pharmacists will be able to achieve over the next few years. His parents are both in their 70s and have chronic conditions. His father has diabetes and high blood pressure and it is difficult for him to get regular appointments with his GP. "Imagine a world where suddenly there is a pharmacist available for [my parents] to see. Dad can go to the pharmacist and have his blood sugar level monitored. The pharmacist can tell him he may have to adjust his dose or look at what he is eating because his blood glucose is a bit erratic." Pradip predicts that this would make a significant difference to his father's quality of life. He believes that the profession is almost on the crest of a wave. "If we grasp the opportunity the difference we can make, both for the profession and the people in our community, is phenomenal. And I am now in the job where I can help Boots to make that difference," he says.

A typical week

Pradip will usually spend two days in head office, two days in stores and one day meeting with key people within the profession, such as the National Pharmaceutical Association, the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee, the Company Chemists Association, the Department of Health, the Boots Pharmacist's Association and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society.

His time in head office is spent working with colleagues in other teams to convert ideas around pharmacy into practice in stores. He also has a role working alongside key managers to take the company as a whole forward. Store visits have the aim of helping him to see what is working, what is not working and what can be done better. Key to this process is listening, he says.

"We learn by listening. The more we listen, the more we learn. The more we learn, the more we can help. It is still a new role, and I have a lot to learn. The one area I am really fanatical about is making a step change in the recruitment, development and retention of our health care teams in stores. And that means making the experience of being a pharmacist with Boots even better."

Training

Boots places a great emphasis on training and continuing professional development. It already has extensive programmes for its vacation students and preregistration trainees. These cover the competencies required by the Society with a focus on the reflective learning process that is integral to CPD. Boots offers three years of vacation experience for pharmacy students, each year comprising a different structured eight-week programme. The third-year of this programme is now used to recruit preregistration trainees.

At the end of February the company will be launching a one-year newly qualified foundation programme consisting of a series of face-to-face training modules designed to support the clinical, professional and managerial development of new pharmacists. Boots will also be launching a three-year distance learning

programme for established pharmacists called ASPIRE. The programme will incorporate core and optional modules covering a mixture of professional and business issues. The distance learning programme will be backed up by area support groups and access to Pharmacy 1st, Boots's online CPD support program. ASPIRE will allow pharmacists to choose the modules that interest them and will provide the flexibility required to meet the demands of the new pharmacy contract. The aim is that it will ultimately lead to an external accreditation.

Benefits

This year, preregistration trainees at Boots will receive an annual salary of £16,500. Once registered the salary will move to above £30,000. Newly qualified pharmacists are entitled to 25 days' annual leave; this can increase to 30 days with promotion or long service. Royal Pharmaceutical Society registration fees and up to two days' CPD time are paid for by Boots, and a bonus scheme operates based on store performance. Other benefits include a final salary pension scheme and a 22.5 per cent staff discount on Boots products.

Another incentive is the flexibility that exists in terms of working part time, full time, or even term time only. If pharmacists prefer, they are able to negotiate a condensed working week, allowing a three-day weekend. Boots also permits career breaks, with a six-month sabbatical being possible after one year of service.

What is Boots looking for?

Since there is no standard store, there is no standard model for a "Boots pharmacist". Paul Stretton, HR manager for health care professionals, says that the idea that Boots wants all pharmacists to be managers is a myth that needs to be dispelled. "We want a proportion to be managers, but there are lots of different opportunities to reflect the diversity of interests of pharmacists," he explains. He says that a passion for community pharmacy is essential and a desire to work with, and to support, a team is key.

Further information can be obtained at www.recruit.boots.co.uk.