



Tips on choosing the best preregistration placement for you

by Lamia Samrin

If you are in the third year of your degree it is time you began to plan for your preregistration year. To help with this, it is worth undertaking work experience and visiting potential companies that you may be interested in working for, to ensure that you choose the best preregistration placement for you. It is an important decision, so do as much research as possible — after all, this year will shape your pharmacy career.

Community

A community placement may either be with large chain of pharmacies or with a smaller independent one. They will all essentially entail the provision of first-hand health-care services to the public.

During the year, various companies will do roadshows at your school of pharmacy and provide presentations about the type of training and benefits they offer for the preregistration year. You should aim to attend as many of these as possible and speak to representatives present. Collect the information they provide and ask questions about training and any special services available. When speaking to the companies it is in your best interest to make a good impression. Make notes of the answers they give since it could be useful when applying for places and attending interviews. The more roadshows you can attend, the better equipped you will be to make an informed decision.

Hospital

With the NHS scheme for England and Wales, you can apply to a maximum of four hospitals. It is an online application. You will receive a preregistration handbook from your

school of pharmacy with details of each hospital and contact person. It is a good idea to get some work experience in hospital pharmacy and even visit the hospitals to ensure that you will like working there before applying. Some regions will also visit schools of pharmacy and give a presentation about applying and working in the NHS. It is useful to attend these as they will explain the online application process and help you distinguish between the different types of NHS trusts.

Industry

Industrial placements are still difficult to come by. However more companies are now advertising preregistration places, so the situation is improving. Industry will provide a unique type of placement and, if that is the aspect of pharmacy that interests you, you need to attend industry roadshows and certainly try to secure a summer placement. This will make you a much stronger candidate, since you will already have knowledge of what the job entails. You will find that industrial preregistration places are split with hospital or community. Do your research carefully and speak with the designated preregistration tutors at each company to find out what the split placement is or if you have any further questions. Your teacher practitioners are also a good source of advice if you need it.

Six-month split placements

Unless you are on a sandwich course, split placements are not particularly common. Split placements can provide an opportunity to experience more than one area of practice — from industry, hospital, community, academia or primary care. If you are interested in such a

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read it for spelling and grammatical errors. It is also vital that you read all the directions carefully, for example, if it says write in black ink and capitals, do so. Once you have completed it, photocopy or print the final copy and keep it to revise from before your interview.

Hospital interviews usually take place during the last two weeks of September. Do not go on holiday during this period,

as hospitals are unlikely to reschedule an interview and will make you look as though you are not keen to work for them.

After hospital interviews are complete, most regions hold a second round of interviews for unsuccessful candidates, and offer the applicants alternative hospitals. Therefore unless you are sure which region you want to work in, it might be worth applying to hospitals in four different regions. This means you can potentially be reconsidered for four hospitals rather than one.

Preparing for the interview

In the period leading up to your interview, keep up to date with current issues affecting pharmacy as a profession. The best way to do this is to read the *PJ* every week and even read a newspaper once a week for up to date health issues in general. Prepare for your interview by reading through your application form — you are likely to be asked questions relating to it. If you are travelling to the interview, make sure you give yourself enough time. Keep a contact number with you in case you get delayed.

During the interview, keep calm. When asked a question, take your time to formulate the answer before speaking. If you have interests, hobbies or experiences that may be of interest to your interviewers try to incorporate them

placement, you need to be pro-active and speak to your teacher practitioners about this type of placement. Apply as quickly as possible to give yourself the best chance of succeeding.

Applying for a placement

Keep a diary of the deadlines and start filling in your application forms as soon as possible. This is because many companies request information from your referees before making the decision to interview you. If you submit these during the holidays they may not get hold of them. Most community sector deadlines are between May and the end of June and hospital deadlines at the end of August.

It may be useful to do some reading of current pharmaceutical issues before completing the application forms. Useful resources include *The Pharmaceutical Journal (PJ)*, *Tomorrow's Pharmacist* and anything given to you from your school of pharmacy.

Choosing the right location is also important. Try to be as honest as possible on your application form. If you really do not mind where you go, then say so, but be aware that you may be offered a less desirable location.

Once you have completed your application form, ask someone to proof

into your answers. You may find it useful to practise some common preregistration interview questions, which you can find out about from your lecturers and any preregistration trainees and pharmacists you know. There is some guidance regarding interview techniques and example questions available on the hospital pharmacy application website.

You will most likely get a chance to ask questions after the interview. It is worth preparing a couple of questions before hand. Try to ask about something that has not been covered within the interview.

When you are offered a place there may not be long to make a decision. You may receive other offers within that period. Take your time and carefully consider your options. After all, you have to decide whether you will be happy working there for 12 months.

If you are unsuccessful the first time round, do not worry. Hospitals have a clearing system and your school of pharmacy will have a list of local community pharmacies that have preregistration places available.

Finally. . .

From personal experience, the most important piece of advice I can give is to be yourself. Be honest on your application form, and you will be well respected for it and be able to perform better at your interview.

Be focused, determined and confident. Make sure you give your employers as many positive reasons to offer you the job as possible. Look smart and professional — it will reflect a lot about how you will perform as a pharmacist. There is a lot of competition out there, but if you have put some effort into preparing for your interview, it will be evident to your employers.

I hope this has been a useful guide to get you started with the preregistration process. Good luck with your application. For further information, you can contact me at gradofficer@bpsa.com. ✍