

# HEADING TO HOSPITAL?

**John Minshull describes some of the things you might experience if you undertake your preregistration year in the hospital sector**

John Minshull is a pharmacist at Queen Elizabeth Hospital NHS Trust, London

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Just as your choice of degree course will impact largely on your future career, the sector in which you choose to undertake your preregistration training is likely to influence the way your career develops.

The pharmacist's traditional role is in the community and, with the development of roles more and more integral to the management of public health, this is still seen as a highly desirable location. However, if you want to work closely with patients and other health care professionals, it should not be forgotten that the supply of medicines is essential to the successful running of a hospital and a career in hospital pharmacy can prove to be highly rewarding, if at times both physically and mentally demanding.

## **Learning the ropes**

Hospital pharmacy departments can be dynamic environments, which best suit people who are interested in simultaneously learning from a variety of people with diverse backgrounds. Your training will benefit from the experience and knowledge of assistants, technicians and pharmacists of various levels. Quickly you will realise that you are a valuable member of the team, even if it is not the way you had previously expected.

Early visits to the ward provide a sobering reminder that there is still a lot to learn. Knowledge gleaned from undergraduate training is obviously of use and, if you are lucky, will still be fresh in your mind. However, it should

not be forgotten that you are no longer in the classroom. Application of knowledge on the ward or in the dispensary is different from university case studies.

When you have accepted how much you have to learn, you are ready start taking advantage of the opportunities provided for you. Hospital pharmacists are called upon to provide a broad range of services and the preregistration year is the ideal time to experience as many of these as possible. It is expected that by the end of your training, as well as being in a fit state to pass the registration examination, you will be a suitable candidate for rotational pharmacist posts.

**Medicines information** The medicines information (MI) department is the hub of pharmaceutical knowledge in any hospital pharmacy. Many MI departments will offer an enquiry service for medical staff, allied health professionals and members of the public. During your training in this section it is normal to follow the UK MI education package, which ensures that the minimum skills you will develop here will be nationally approved. You will have the opportunity to sharpen your research skills on genuine enquiries as they come in.

**Technical services** As patient safety raises its profile and the NHS focuses further on managing risk, it is not too hard to imagine technical services offered by the pharmacy department taking on an even greater importance.

The technical services area provides high-risk drugs to high-risk patients. It is also the area of the pharmacy where all of the things you learnt at university take on an urgent significance. Clinical pharmacy and microbiology are inextricably bound to the physiochemical properties of drugs and risk management.

During your training here, you will see how a team of pharmacists, technicians and assistants work daily to ensure medicines can be produced safely within the hospital. In technical services, you will learn a variety of skills; from total-parenteral-nutrition prescription checking to reviewing prescriptions for complex chemotherapy regimens against national guidelines and from risk management to writing standard operating procedures correctly.

**Dispensary services** The dispensary remains at the heart of clinical pharmacy services in many NHS trusts. Without the dispensary, you quickly realise there would be little point in any of the other pharmacy endeavours. At times, it may feel like your dispensary slots are innumerable and interminable, but there is a lot to learn. Safe dispensing procedures, commonly encountered doses and legal prescription requirements can be memorised quickly when they become part of everyday life. Other competencies can be learnt from subsequent additions to your dispensary workload, which may include accuracy checking and dispensary work flow management. If these reasons do not encourage you, it



will be the skills learnt in the dispensary that make you most employable as a locum, should you wish to supplement your NHS salary in your later career.

**Regional training** Not all of your training can take place in the hospital pharmacy department. The provision of regional training should be recognised as an important contributor to a preregistration trainee's development. Regional training includes attendance at workshops that cover topics that might otherwise be missed by NHS training (eg, dealing with minor ailments) and lectures on subjects that are really just better tackled by groups larger than can be created in your hospital base (eg, ethical decision making).

**Cross-sector placement** The Royal Pharmaceutical Society recommends that all preregistration trainees should experience both the community and hospital sectors. For hospital preregistration trainees this involves leaving the bosom of your department and joining a community pharmacy team. Here you are presented with another valuable opportunity to garner skills and information. The focus here will be the multitudinous aspects to pharmacy not directly related to the hospital. It is essential to ensure you familiarise yourself with NHS prescriptions, the Drug Tariff and the

NHS Business Services Authority processes.

#### **Catching on**

Before long, elements of your training will start to slot into place and you will notice a change in your abilities. The ward, where a sizable proportion of your training is likely to take place, will no longer feel like a foreign environment and you will start to recognise the relevance of your knowledge. Also, other people will start to recognise the contributions you make.

Throughout the training year, there is a requirement on you to keep a record of your development. The mandatory records are the same in the hospital as they are in the community. Each record you make will detail a new experience, the strengths you showed and any learning you think could help you in the future. There are four meetings equally spaced through the year, where your tutor can sit down with you and discuss your progress. The records of experiences you make will form the basis for these meetings. Remember: the better your records, the more absolute your development will be.

#### **Reflecting**

At the end of the preregistration training period it will probably be quite

hard to find time to sit back and reflect on the year. The registration examination date will be imminent, you may have interviews to attend and your workload could have grown exponentially. You will not require the same input from other members of the department that you demanded only 12 months earlier and you will forge professional relationships for yourself at ward and departmental levels.

That is not to say you will not receive support any more or that you will not need advice from more senior members of the team. We all need advice and assistance at times. Throughout your training there will always be someone on hand to answer your questions. One of the best aspects of the NHS preregistration training is that this person need not always be your tutor; there are plenty of other people willing to reflect on their past experiences to help you out.

#### **The cycle continues**

If your preregistration training is successful, you should receive a pass in the registration examination and your tutor will sign you off as a competent pharmacist. Your preregistration training will come to an end. You will be ready to work as a pharmacist. ■