

Working life (pharmaceutical medicine)

This page provides useful information about the roles and responsibilities of doctors in pharmaceutical medicine, where they work, who they work with and what they feel about their role.

?During student and clinical training I thrived in research environments, finding clinical and basic science both invigorating and rewarding. As a specialist registrar I found the limited time and resources to engage in meaningful research frustrating. I became aware that much ground-breaking research was performed within the pharmaceutical industry and found myself increasingly attracted to a career in clinical research and development. I have now been doing this for six years and continue to find my job challenging, rewarding and intellectually stimulating. (Pharmaceutical physician)

Specialists work in pharmaceutical companies, medicines regulatory agencies and clinical research organisations (some within hospital premises). They could also work in their own offices or in venues within the healthcare industry, the NHS, the government or academia. Work may be based within or outside the UK.

The working day is project-based, with the pharmaceutical physician acting as leader or team member. Meetings with colleagues, project teams or committees are common, as is working within learning and teaching situations and attending seminars and conferences.

Depending on the experience and expertise of the specialist, the project activities relate to:

- advising, planning, organising, analysing and reporting clinical trials on medicines
- collecting, assessing and regulatory reporting of suspected adverse drug reactions
- preparing product information such as an investigator's brochure, a summary of product characteristics or patient information leaflets
- ensuring promotional material complies with relevant pharmaceutical industry codes of practice
- preparing reports such as safety summaries and periodic safety update reports, eg managing submissions to NICE and SMC
- undertaking due diligence on medicinal products for acquisition

The only constant is that there is no such thing as a typical day!

Basic hours are office hours. There is no shift work and few on-call duties. However, the hours worked may extend beyond the standard day to complete projects on time and to the highest standards. This could mean UK and international travel, out-of-hours meetings, meeting deadlines for reports and regulatory timelines.

- Who you will work with

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Pharmaceutical physicians work alongside:

- clinical research scientists
- statisticians and data managers
- clinical trial monitors

They also work closely with:

- business development, commercial, accountancy, legal, financial, HR, quality management and QA staff
- Attractions and challenges of the role

Expand / collapse

Careers in pharmaceutical medicine are attractive for doctors who feel that their medical skills extend beyond individual patient encounters. Commercial acumen, management and leadership skills and an ability to communicate effectively are all hallmarks of successful doctors in the industry. The work influences many aspects of the medical profession such as the development of new medicines for future healthcare.

Pharmaceutical physicians report that the work is never repetitive, dull or boring. They encounter new sets of challenges and problems every working day, and there is a strong sense of accomplishment, teamwork and collaboration in their job environment.

Challenges include keeping up-to-date in pharmaceutical medicine. This area is continually developing as R&D for new medicines crosses new frontiers and commercialisation of medicines becomes both more stringent and competitive. Other disciplines such as pharmacoepidemiology, pharmacoconomics, IT and knowledge management also impact on the day-to-day activities of pharmaceutical medicine more than previously.

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