

Real-life story - Rebecca Cohen

Rebecca enjoyed her time as a science teacher but decided to further her own scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of patients.

Rebecca Cohen

Trainee clinical pharmaceutical scientist

Employer or university

Leeds Teaching Hospital NHS Trust/Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust

Salary range

£25k-£35k

Rebecca Cohen working in lab

I spend most of my time working behind the scenes so I love spending time on the wards learning from my clinical colleagues.

How I got into the role

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I graduated with a BSc in chemistry from the University of Leeds and went on to teach science in a secondary school. I really enjoyed my time in the classroom but realised I had stopped learning about science myself. I'm currently in my second year of the NHS Scientist Training Programme, specialising in clinical pharmaceutical science.

I chose pharmaceutical science because it combines a range of scientific disciplines; I am able to put my chemistry degree into practice whilst at the same time I'm developing my knowledge and skills in biology and physics.

What I do

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The training programme has four rotations: quality assurance ^[1] and quality control; production; radiopharmacy; and aseptic services. This means I'm continuously experiencing new situations and meeting and learning from a wide range of people at all levels of seniority. Every day presents a new challenge and I've been involved in everything from the introduction of a new piece of equipment to validating a new manufacturing process.

The programme takes three years and involves studying for an MSc at the University of Manchester.

The best bits and challenges

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Pharmacy technical services is a great field to work in because it's evolving quickly. It also presents a big challenge too because people are tempted to say "but we've always done it this way." One of my responsibilities is to encourage colleagues to look to the future and embrace change!

I spend most of my time working behind the scenes so I love spending time on the wards learning from my clinical colleagues. I'm not in direct contact with patients, but it's very important that I put them at the centre of everything I do.

I also run continuous professional development sessions for staff working in a range of roles which raises awareness of both my own role and the training programme.

Life outside work

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I enjoy keeping fit and spending time with my family and friends. It's very important to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Career plans and top tips for others

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I'm very excited about my MSc project which will look at new rapid microbiology technology – something that could be introduced into aseptic services at Leeds Teaching Hospital within the next few years. I'm keen to learn more about clinical trials as part of my elective ^[2] too.

I'd advise anyone considering applying for the STP ^[3] to undertake a work experience placement to ensure they've spent time in the environment they'll be working in and finding out what will be expected of them. And take the opportunity to talk to people already on the programme to hear about their experience of the application process and the training itself.

The attributes I've relied most heavily on so far are the ability to learn quickly and adapt to changing environments. And I'm not afraid to ask for help when I need it.

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Links

[1] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Quality_assurance [2]

<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Elective> [3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#STP>