

# Pharmacist

Pharmacists are experts in medicines and their use. They also offer health advice to patients on issues such as sexual health and giving up smoking.?

See how they use their knowledge of medicines to help people with every type of medical condition and find out how you could use your science skills to become a pharmacist.



## Working life

Medicines are the most common treatments offered to NHS patients. A pharmacist is an expert in medicines and their use. Their knowledge of medicines and the effect they have on the human body is critical for the successful management of every type of medical condition.

Pharmacists:

- advise other healthcare professionals, including doctors and nurses, on how to choose medicines and use them correctly
- ensure that new medicines are safe to use with other medication
- advise on dosage and suggest the most appropriate form of medication such as tablet, injection,

ointment or inhaler

- make sure that patients use their medicines safely
- provide information to patients on how get the maximum benefit from the medicines they are prescribed
- advise on the most effective treatments for a particular condition including those for sale without prescription
- help patients manage long term conditions
- recommend changes to prescriptions and give advice on prescribing
- provide information about potential side effects
- monitor the effects of treatment to ensure that it is safe and effective

Pharmacists are also involved in manufacturing medicines when ready-made preparations are not available. For example, certain cancer treatments and intravenous feeding solutions need to be tailor made under sterile conditions for individual patients.

You may choose to specialise in a particular area of practice

Pharmacists work as part of healthcare teams in hospitals or community pharmacies. Some work in retail pharmacies in supermarkets or on the high street, or for other employers that provide NHS services. Community pharmacists are based in health centres or pharmacies but they may spend time visiting patients at home or in residential homes.

Pharmacists may also supervise pharmacy technician [1] and pharmacy assistants [2] in purchasing, quality testing or dispensing medicines.?

## Entry requirements?

To practise as a pharmacist, you have to be registered with the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC). To register, you need to study for an accredited Masters degree in pharmacy (MPharm). Universities across the UK offer the course, which lasts four years, full time. Use our course finder to find out where you can study pharmacy. [3]

To get onto a Master's course in pharmacy you need three A-B grade A-levels in chemistry and biology, maths or physics along with five GCSEs (grades A-C), including English language, maths and at least one science.

Or you could use alternative qualifications, including:

- foundation degree in pharmacy
- BTEC, HND or HNC which includes science
- relevant NVQ
- science-based access course
- equivalent Scottish or Irish qualifications

However, each institution sets its own entry requirements, so it's important to check carefully. Wherever you study, you will need to show that you have an understanding of pharmacy and how it benefits patients. It is a good idea to spend some time with a registered pharmacist to see what the work is like.

After university, to become a fully qualified pharmacist you'll need to:

- work for a 1-year pre-registration period under supervision in a community or hospital pharmacy
- pass a registration exam

## Skills and personal characteristics needed?

Pharmacists need to be:

- accurate and methodical
- able to understand and apply the law
- responsible
- interested in people's health
- willing to supervise others
- able to work with all types of people
- able to explain clearly to members of the public
- communication skills including listening
- good customer skills
- science skills

## Training and development

Once qualified, many pharmacists join the Royal Pharmaceutical Society [4] (RPS). Registered pharmacists have to keep their skills and knowledge up to date with annual continuing professional development (CPD). The RPS runs courses, conferences and seminars where pharmacists can exchange ideas and update their skills.

Experienced pharmacists can do additional training and qualifications to allow them to prescribe medicines.

## Career Planning for Healthcare Professionals programme

Health Education England has developed an e-learning programme for healthcare professionals including pre-registration / foundation pharmacists, to help them make informed career choices and effective applications for their next career steps.

Find out more about the programme [5]

## Want to find out more?

- Find out more about studying to be a pharmacist. [6]
- Pay and conditions

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Pharmacists working in the NHS will work standard hours of around 37.5 a week which may include shifts. Newly qualified pharmacists will usually start in the NHS on band 6 of the Agenda for Change [7] pay scale. With further study and training, they can apply for posts at band 7. Senior pharmacy roles can be on band 9 as a most senior manager of pharmaceutical services.?

Find out more about the pay and benefits of a career in the NHS. [8]?

Terms and conditions can vary for pharmacists outside of the NHS, including those working in high

street and retail pharmacies.?

- Where the role can lead

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You may choose to specialise in a particular area of practice such as mental health, oncology [9] (cancer treatment) or paediatrics. Teaching or research are also options. Some pharmacists move into areas such as the regulation of medicines, veterinary pharmacy or into industry.

You could also move into management, either within pharmacy or general management. As head of a local pharmacy service you would be responsible both for a team of staff and for managing a budget.

Some pharmacists decide to set up their own pharmacies in high street shops, either working on their own or with other professionals.

- Job market and vacancies

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According to the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) there were approximately 47,391 registered pharmacists in Great Britain in March 2013. Pharmacist student numbers have also increased significantly over the last ten years. In 2015, there was an increase of 9.5% in the number of pre-registration training places in the NHS.

NHS trusts advertise their vacancies on NHS Jobs [10] and some advertise on their own websites. You can find a list of NHS organisations on the NHS Choices [11] website.

If you're applying for a role either directly in the NHS or in an organisation that provides NHS services, you'll be asked to show how you think the NHS values apply in your everyday work.

Find out more about NHS values. [12]

- Further information

Expand / collapse

- Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain [13]
- General Pharmaceutical Council [14]
- National Pharmacy Association [15]
- Oriel [16] (for pre-registration hospital pharmacist training in England and Wales)
- Primary Care Pharmacists Association [17]

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## Other roles that may interest you

- Pharmacy assistant [18]
- Pharmaceutical medicine [19]
- Pharmacy technician [20]
- Clinical biochemistry [21]

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**Source URL:** <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/pharmacy/roles-pharmacy/pharmacist>

### **Links**

- [1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/pharmacy/pharmacy-technician>
- [2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/pharmacy/pharmacy-assistant>
- [3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/looking-course>
- [4] <http://www.rpharms.com/>
- [5] <https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/career-planning-for-healthcare-professionals/>
- [6] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/considering-or-university/studying-pharmacy>
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