Pharmacy technician

Pharmacy technicians are senior members of the pharmacy team who manage and prepare the supply of medicines and give advice to patients and customers.

In community pharmacy, pharmacy technicians may also be involved in delivering some public health services such as advice on stopping smoking.

Working life

The role pharmacy technician is regulated and has developed significantly in recent years. You will carry out some of the same tasks as a pharmacist, engaging with patients and managing the supply of medicines in a community pharmacy, and liaising with other members of the healthcare team.

In a hospital, you could manage the pharmacy department, be involved in taking medicine histories from patients and reviewing medicines, counselling, and giving advice on different treatment options. You may also work on implementing IT systems, governance and
medication safety. You will likely provide a link between wards, patients and the pharmacy, or manufacture medicines where ready-made preparations are not available.

In community pharmacy, pharmacy technicians may give advice to patients on stopping smoking, and provide expertise on different treatment options for patients in a specialist area, such as mental health or general practice.

The work of a pharmacy technician includes:

- taking in and handing out prescriptions
- dispensing prescriptions
- using computer systems to generate stock lists and labels
- ordering items
- receiving, loading, unloading deliveries
- delivering medicines to other parts of a hospital or health centre
- selling over-the-counter medicines
- answering customers questions face to face or by phone
- pre-packing, assembling and labelling medicines
- preparing medicines
- referring problems or queries to the pharmacist

**Where do pharmacy technicians work?**

Pharmacy technicians work as part of healthcare teams in hospitals, primary care [1] (including GP surgeries) and community pharmacies. Some work in retail pharmacies in supermarkets or on the high street, in care homes or for other employers that provide NHS services.

They can also be found working in health and justice services, the armed forces and industry.

**Entry requirements**

To practise as a pharmacy technician, you have to be registered with the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC). To register, you need to study for an accredited qualification such as:

- BTEC National Diploma in pharmaceutical science
- NVQ/SVQ level 3 in pharmacy services
- National Certificate in pharmaceutical science
To apply for a course, you need to be working in a pharmacy. Employers, including the NHS, offer jobs for trainee pharmacy technicians (or dispensing assistants). Find courses on our course finder.

Employers usually ask for at least 4 GCSEs (9-4/A*-C), including English, maths and two science or equivalent qualifications. It will help your application if you can 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.

**Skills and personal characteristics**

Pharmacy technicians need to be confident to work with all sorts of people, have good communication skills (including listening and the ability to explain clearly) and be organised. You need to be:

- accurate and methodical
- responsible
- able to pay attention to detail
- ready to refer to the pharmacist when necessary
- able to understand law and guidelines on medicines
- able to read and carry out instructions
- interested in people’s health
- able to explain clearly to members of the public

You also need good customer relation and organisational skills, science skills and good manual (hand) skills.

**Training and development**

Training to become a pharmacy technician usually takes two years. It combines practical work experience with study, either at college or by distance learning. Courses cover:

- human physiology
- disease management
- actions and uses of medicine pharmacy manufacturing
- pharmacy law

Level 3 apprenticeships for pharmacy technicians are available with some employers. You can search for vacancies on the NHS Jobs website and Find an Apprenticeship website.

To practise in Great Britain, pharmacy technicians must be registered with the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) and have satisfied the Council that it meets its detailed requirements. Registered pharmacy technicians have to keep their skills and knowledge up to
Once qualified, many pharmacy technicians join the Association of Pharmacy Technicians (APTUK). The APTUK runs courses, conferences and seminars where pharmacy technicians can exchange ideas and update their skills.

Qualified and experienced pharmacy technicians can go on to study to become a pharmacist.

- Pay and conditions

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Pharmacy technicians working in the NHS will work standard hours of around 37.5 a week which may include shifts. Newly qualified pharmacy technicians will usually start in the NHS at band 4 of the Agenda for Change (AfC) pay scale.

Find out more about the pay and benefits of a career in the NHS.

Terms and conditions can vary for pharmacists outside of the NHS, including those working in high street and retail pharmacies, or for other employers that provide NHS services.

- Where the role can lead

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With experience, you could specialise in a particular area of practice such as mental health, oncology (cancer treatment) or paediatrics. Or you could specialise in areas such as medicines management, manufacturing, quality control, education and training, information technology, supplies procurement, clinical trials or medicine information services.

Many pharmacy technicians are extending their roles to work with pharmacists (and other healthcare staff) in helping patients to manage their medicines. These specialist roles involve checking and recording the medication that patients should be taking, ensuring sufficient supplies, and counselling patients to understand how to use their medicines safely on the hospital wards, and when they return home. They can also take additional training and assessment to allow them to perform the final accuracy check of prescriptions before being issued to the patient. In hospital and industry pharmacy technicians manage the technical aspects of dispensing services and manufacturing medicines.

You could become a senior pharmacy technician, responsible for the work of other technicians. A chief pharmacy technician is responsible for the day-to-day management of a pharmacy department.

- Job market and vacancies

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Recent figures show that pharmacy technician training places are on the increase with 363 commissioned places, an increase of 21% on the previous year.


Large retail pharmacies, including those in supermarkets, usually advertise for trainees on their own websites. From time to time, individual high street pharmacies may also advertise locally for trainees.

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. [15]

• Further information

Expand / collapse

○ General Pharmaceutical Council [16]
○ The Association of Pharmacy Technicians [17]
○ National Pharmacy Association [18]

Other roles that may interest you

• Pharmacy assistant [19]
• Pharmacist [20]
• Pharmaceutical medicine [21]
• Clinical pharmaceutical science [22]

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