

Exciting times for education

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In the UK three groups of hospital pharmacy staff have training requirements set by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB).

Pharmacists undertake a four-year Master of Pharmacy (MPharm) degree. This is followed by a year of preregistration training, during which they are employed, and at the end of which they take the RPSGB's registration exam. The pharmacist registers with the RPSGB, becoming a registered pharmacist and Member of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (MRPharmS). The majority of preregistration trainee pharmacists spend the whole year in the hospital which employs them, although some split their time with community or industrial pharmacy.

Pharmacy Technicians: A preregistration trainee pharmacy technician, employed by a hospital, usually attends a further education college for one day a week to gain a "technical certificate" covering key knowledge for the Scottish/National Vocational Qualifications (S/NVQ) Level 3 in Pharmaceutical Services. Evidence is also gathered in the workplace to show the trainee has met the performance criteria required. Once this has been completed a pharmacy technician can register with the RPSGB as a Registered Pharmacy Technician (RegPharmTech). This is currently voluntary, but it is anticipated that it will shortly become mandatory.

Pharmacy Assistants are required by

the RPSGB to undertake training modules of the S/NVQ Level 2 Pharmacy Services qualification that are relevant to their job; frequently this is achieved in the workplace.

Post-qualification training

Qualified Pharmacists: Hospital pharmacists usually study for a Diploma in Pharmacy Practice or similar. Professional development frameworks help to determine what is required of an individual pharmacist at a particular point in their career. Pharmacists can specialise in certain therapeutic areas, and/or develop their management skills.

Qualified Pharmacy Technicians: Many pharmacy technicians become "accredited checking pharmacy technicians". This means that when a prescription has been clinically screened by the pharmacist, it can be dispensed, and an accredited pharmacy technician can check the dispensed item for the correct medicine in the correct format, quantity and labelling. This system allows pharmacists to concentrate on other areas of care and improves the efficiency of pharmacy services.

Pharmacy technicians can also develop their expertise in specialist areas such as medicines management, aseptics, patient counselling and leadership.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians who are registered with the RPSGB are required to undertake CPD. There is no longer a requirement in terms of hours,

instead practitioners log learning and development experiences, usually into the RPSGB's web-based system. Practitioners must log around 12 CPD entries per year.

Change on the horizon

Imminent changes to the RPSGB, including the creation of a new regulator, the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC), and a new professional body for pharmacy, will have implications for education. The regulator will set the standards and the new professional body will work with the regulator and the pharmacy community to ensure that training programmes are in place so that practitioners can meet those standards.

A recent government paper states that it will look at increasing clinical experience earlier in a trainee pharmacist's development, with one option being to integrate the MPharm degree with the current preregistration training for trainee pharmacists. This change is an opportunity to improve training, but it will need to be properly managed and funded by universities and employers if real progress is to be achieved.

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