

Q&A with Year 2000 Graduates



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(Note: The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Indian Health Service.)

Q: Describe your typical workday.

A: My typical workday varies depending on my assignment for the week. I spend about 75% of my shifts in an outpatient clinic environment, where I screen medical charts for appropriate drug therapy and counsel patients. I also rotate through our anticoagulation clinic and give subcutaneous erythropoietin injections to end-stage renal disease patients. The remaining 25% of my shifts involve providing inpatient pharmacy services while on 24-hour emergency callback (cardiac codes and rapid sequence intubation) or working in our remote outpatient satellite clinic.

Q: How has your job changed/advanced in your second year of employment?

A: As a resident, I performed staff functions only 50% of my day—I now perform them full time. However, I now can apply what I have learned as a primary care resident to managing drug therapy with increased knowledge and skill. I have also assumed the role of Student Extern Program Coordinator since completing my residency, working with pharmacy students from more than a dozen universities to offer them rotations at our institution. In addition, I publish two quarterly pharmacy newsletters, one for patients and one for medical staff. All of these responsibilities give me the variety and breadth of experience that I desire.

Q: Has your second year of employment been better or worse than your first?

A: My second year has been better because I feel more comfortable on the job than I did fresh out of pharmacy school. There can be quite a difference between what you learn in school vs real-life pharmacy practice, and I think I have better professional judgment now than I did as a newly licensed pharmacist.

Q: After working in the field for a few years, what do you wish you had learned in college to help you with your real-life work experience?

A: I wish I had learned more about patient counseling and ways to improve their adherence with their medication regimens. Noncompliance is a ubiquitous problem in our patient population,

and I constantly search for ways to improve adherence and help patients become more active in managing their own health care.

Q: What was the most important thing you learned in college as it applies to your work experience?

A: Without a doubt, therapeutics. Although medicinal chemistry and pharmacology are important aspects of a thorough education in pharmacy, therapeutics is the heart and soul of my daily practice. I think pharmacy schools should focus on providing the best possible education in therapeutics, both in terms of quality and quantity.

Q: Describe the positive and negative aspects of your job.

A: Fortunately, the positives far outweigh the negatives. The positive aspects include having access to the patient's complete medical chart, the excellent working relationship among all health care professionals, patient counseling, and the many benefits of a career in the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service. I enjoy the ability to use everything I learned in pharmacy school on a daily basis, and the satisfaction that comes with serving my country—especially in light of the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001. The negative aspects primarily involve the heavy daily workload. A shortage of qualified pharmacists has always been an issue in the Indian Health Service, although the adoption of special pay, an accession bonus, and participation in a loan repayment program has made our organization more competitive.

Q: What advice do you have for a student interested in your field?

A: Learn as much as you can about therapeutics, hone your clinical skills, and practice patient counseling at every opportunity. I also suggest applying for a Junior Commissioned Student Extern Program (JRCOSTEP) position. The JRCOSTEP is a paid internship that usually takes place over the summer months, giving pharmacy students invaluable experience in the practice of pharmacy. This will allow you to see firsthand whether a career with the U.S. Public Health Service is the right match for you. 