

Pharmacy Tech

Pharmacy technicians fill prescriptions and check inventory. Pharmacy technicians help licensed pharmacists dispense prescription medication. They work in retail pharmacies and hospitals.

Duties Pharmacy technicians typically do the following:

- Take the information needed to fill a prescription
- Count tablets and measure amounts of other medication for prescriptions
- Compound or mix medications, such as preparing ointments
- Package and label prescriptions
- Accept payment for prescriptions and process insurance claims
- Do routine pharmacy tasks, such as answering phone calls from customers

Pharmacy technicians work under the supervision of pharmacists, who must review all prescriptions before they are given to patients. If a customer's question is about the medication or health matters, the pharmacy technician arranges for the customer to speak with the pharmacist.

Pharmacy technicians working in hospitals and other medical facilities prepare a greater variety of medications, such as intravenous medications. They may make rounds in the hospital, giving medications to patients.

- Pharmacies and drug stores 54%
- Hospitals 18%
- Grocery stores 7%
- Other stores 7%

Work Environment Pharmacy technicians work primarily in pharmacies, including those found in grocery and drug stores, and in hospitals.

Pharmacy technicians held about 334,400 jobs in 2010. They worked primarily in pharmacies, including those found in grocery and drug stores, and in hospitals. Pharmacy technicians spend most of the workday on their feet.

As shown in the following tabulation, more than half of pharmacy technicians were employed in pharmacies and drug stores in 2010.

Work Schedules Pharmacies may be open at all hours. Therefore, pharmacy technicians may have to work nights or weekends. Although most pharmacy technicians work full time, many work part time.

How to Become a Pharmacy Technician Becoming a pharmacy technician usually requires earning a high school diploma or the equivalent. Other requirements vary by state, with some states requiring passing an exam or with some states requiring passing an exam or completing a formal training program.

Education and Training Many pharmacy technicians learn how to perform their duties through on-the-job training. Others attend postsecondary education programs in pharmacy technology at vocational schools or community colleges, which award certificates. These programs typically last 1 year or less and cover a variety of subjects, such as arithmetic used in pharmacies, recordkeeping, ways of dispensing medications, and pharmacy law and ethics. Technicians also learn the names, actions, uses, and doses of medications. Many training programs include internships, in which students get hands-on experience in a pharmacy.

Licenses and Certification Most states regulate pharmacy technicians in some way. Consult your state's Board of Pharmacy for its particular regulations. Requirements for pharmacy technicians typically include some or all of the following: high school diploma or GED; criminal background check; formal training; exam; fees; continuing education.

Some states and employers require pharmacy technicians to have certification. Even where it is not required, certification may make it easier to get a job. Many employers will pay for their pharmacy technicians to take the certification exam.

Two organizations offer certification: [Pharmacy Technician Certification Board \(PTCB\)](#) and [National Healthcareer Association \(NHA\)](#).

Important Qualities

Customer service skills. Pharmacy technicians spend much of their time interacting with customers, so being helpful and polite are required of pharmacy technicians in a retail setting.

Detail oriented. Serious health problems can result from mistakes in filling prescriptions. Although the pharmacist is responsible for ensuring the safety of all medications dispensed, pharmacy technicians should be detail oriented so complications are avoided.

Organizational skills. Working as a pharmacy technician involves balancing a variety of responsibilities. Pharmacy technicians need good organizational skills to complete the work delegated by pharmacists while satisfying customers or patients.

Pay Median annual wages, May 2010: \$39,000

Pharmacies may be open at all hours. Therefore, pharmacy technicians may have to work nights or weekends. Although most pharmacy technicians work full time, many work part time.

Job Outlook Percent change in employment, projected 2010-20: **30% growth**

Employment of pharmacy technicians is expected to grow by 32 percent from 2010 to 2020, much faster than the average for all occupations. As a result of advances in pharmaceutical research, more prescription medications are being used to fight diseases. Also, the number of older people is growing, and older people use more prescription drugs than younger people.

Job Prospects Job prospects should be excellent for pharmacy technicians, particularly those with formal training and those with experience in retail settings.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012-13 Edition*, Pharmacy Technicians, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/pharmacy-technicians.htm> (visited August 10, 2012)

Local Schools: Cumberland County College; Cumberland County TEC

Pharmacist

What Pharmacists Do Pharmacists review the accuracy of each filled prescription before it is given to the customer. Pharmacists dispense prescription medications to patients and offer advice on their safe use.

Duties Pharmacists typically do the following:

- Fill prescriptions, verifying instructions from physicians on the proper amounts of medication to give to patients
- Check whether the prescription will interact negatively with other drugs that a patient is taking or conditions the patient has
- Instruct patients on how and when to take a prescribed medicine
- Advise patients on potential side effects from taking the medicine
- Advise patients about general health topics, such as diet, exercise, and managing stress, and what equipment or supplies would be best for a health problem
- Complete insurance forms and work with insurance companies to be sure that patients get the medicines they need
- Oversee the work of pharmacy technicians and pharmacists in training (interns)
- Keep records and do other administrative tasks
- Teach other healthcare practitioners about proper medication therapies for patients

Some pharmacists who own their store or manage a chain pharmacy spend more time on business activities, such as inventory management. Pharmacists also take continuing education throughout their career to keep up with the latest advances in pharmacological science.

Pharmacists who work in universities or for pharmaceutical manufacturers are involved in researching and testing new medications.

With most drugs, pharmacists use standard dosages from pharmaceutical companies. However, some pharmacists create customized medications by mixing ingredients themselves, a process known as compounding.

Although most pharmacists work in retail stores, some work in specialized fields. The following are examples of types of pharmacists who work in settings outside of retail:

Clinical pharmacists work in hospitals and other healthcare settings. They spend little time dispensing prescriptions. Instead, they are involved in direct patient care. For example, they may go on rounds with a doctor and recommend medications to give to patients. They also counsel patients on how and when to take medications and monitor patients' health.

Consultant pharmacists advise healthcare facilities or insurance providers on how to make pharmacy services more efficient. They also may give advice directly to patients, such as helping seniors manage their prescriptions.

Work Environment Pharmacists may consult with physicians if they have questions concerning a patient's prescription. The following industries employed the largest number of pharmacists in 2010:

- Pharmacies and drug stores 43%
- Hospitals 23%
- Grocery stores 8%
- Department stores 6%
- Other stores 5%

Work Schedules Most pharmacists work full time, although about 21 percent worked part time in 2010. Because many pharmacies are open at all hours, some pharmacists work nights and weekends.

How to Become a Pharmacist Pharmacists must pay attention to detail, ensuring the accuracy of the prescriptions they fill. Pharmacists must have a Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) degree from an accredited school. They also must be licensed, which requires passing two exams.

Education All Doctor of Pharmacy programs require applicants to have taken postsecondary courses such as chemistry, biology, and anatomy. Applicants need at least 2 to 3 years of undergraduate study; for some programs, applicants must have a bachelor's degree. For most programs, applicants also must take the Pharmacy College Admissions Test (PCAT).

Pharm.D. programs usually take 4 years to finish, although some programs offer a 3-year option. The program includes courses in pharmacology and medical ethics, as well as supervised work experiences in different settings, such as hospitals and retail pharmacies.

Pharmacists seeking an advanced pharmacy position, such as a clinical pharmacy or research job, complete a 1- to 2-year residency following their Pharm. D. Some pharmacists who own their own store may choose to get a master's degree in business administration (MBA). Others may get a degree in public health.

Licenses All states license pharmacists. After they finish the Pharm. D., prospective pharmacists must pass two exams to get a license. One of the exams is in pharmacy skills and knowledge. The other is in pharmacy law in the state giving the pharmacy license.

Important Qualities

Analytical skills. Pharmacists must provide safe medications efficiently. To do this, they must be able to evaluate a customer's needs, evaluate the prescriber's orders, and have extensive knowledge about the effects and appropriate circumstances for giving out a specific medication.

Communication skills. Pharmacists frequently offer advice to customers. They might need to explain how to take a medicine, for example, and what its side effects are. They also need to offer clear direction to pharmacy technicians and interns.

Detail oriented. Pharmacists are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the prescriptions they fill, because improper use of medication can pose serious health risks.

Managerial skills. Pharmacists—particularly those who run a retail pharmacy— must have good managerial skills, including managing inventory and overseeing a staff.

Pay Median annual wages, May 2010: **\$111,600**

Most pharmacists work full time, although about 21 percent worked part time in 2010. Because pharmacies are often open at all hours, some pharmacists work nights and weekends.

Job Outlook Percent change in employment, projected 2010-20: **26% growth**

Employment of pharmacists is expected to increase by 25 percent from 2010 to 2020, faster than the average for all occupations. Several factors are likely to contribute to this increase. Scientific advances will lead to new drug products. More people may get insurance coverage for medications. The number of older people is growing, and older people use more prescription medicines than younger people. As healthcare continues to become more complex and as more people take multiple medications, more pharmacists will be needed to counsel patients on how to use their medications safely. Demand is also likely to increase for pharmacists in physicians' offices, outpatient care centers, and nursing homes.

Job Prospects Because a significant number of pharmacists are expected to retire in the coming decade, new pharmacists should expect good job prospects.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012-13 Edition*, Pharmacists, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/pharmacists.htm> (visited August 10, 2012).

Local Schools: Philadelphia College of Pharmacy

