

Pharmacy

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The practice of pharmacy has greatly shifted in the past few decades. Previously, the perception of pharmacists was that they spent most of their time behind the counter in a community pharmacy filling prescriptions and giving advice to their patients. However, pharmacists currently play an important role in utilizing health care, often as advocates, ensuring safe and effective use of medications. Pharmacists work along side other health care providers to educate patients to help them manage disease and their overall health. As professionals, pharmacists are responsible for optimal use of prescription and non-prescription medications.

Pharmacists place of practice

Pharmacists work in a variety of settings, but the most common and most visible area of practice is community pharmacy. Community pharmacists are one of the most accessible health care professionals, and as such, play an important role in medication management and health promotion. Many pharmacists are also employed in hospitals or ambulatory clinics. When patients are admitted to hospital they are commonly prescribed numerous, complex medications. Pharmacists, along with other members of the health care team, help to ensure medications are used safely and effectively. In hospital pharmacy, pharmacists interact greatly with other health care providers. Additionally, many hospital pharmacists actively participate in programs to upgrade their education and knowledge to specialize in specific fields such as oncology or psychiatry. In addition to the areas of practice mentioned above, pharmacists can also work in the pharmaceutical industry. There is a great breadth of opportunities available to pharmacists in industry; positions can include clinical research, drug information, marketing, professional affairs, and regulatory affairs.

Education and preparation

Currently, there are 10 schools of pharmacy in Canada. Each school has different admission requirements; however, all schools require some university level prerequisite courses that may take one or two years to complete. Some schools require the Pharmacy College Admission Test (PCAT), and some schools will also conduct interviews. The majority of pharmacy schools offer a Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy, but some pharmacy schools offer a Doctor of Pharmacy. Across Canada, some pharmacy schools are beginning to phase out the Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy degree and are offering the Doctor of Pharmacy degree solely. Throughout the 4-year curriculum of pharmacy school, pharmacy students learn in depth clinical knowledge regarding medications unlike any other health care professional. Pharmacy students learn therapeutics, pharmacology, medicinal chemistry, toxicology, clinical biochemistry, pharmacokinetics, and pharmaceuticals. Pharmacy students also learn about social and administrative pharmacy, interprofessional relations, law, and pharmacoconomics. In addition to classroom and problem-based learning, pharmacy students complete a practical learning component prior to graduation. Upon completion of a pharmacy degree, graduates can complete other educational opportunities such as a hospital residency or industrial residency. University of Toronto as well as University of British Columbia offer a clinical Doctor of Pharmacy degree as well.

Licensure

As a graduate of a Canadian pharmacy school, pharmacy students must complete two qualifying exams by the Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada. The first exam is a written multiple-choice exam and the second is a structured clinical (practical) exam consisting of stations. Once graduates have completed the qualifying exams they may apply to their provincial college of pharmacy for licensure. Each province requires a jurisprudence exam as well as an internship before becoming a registered, licensed pharmacist.

The role of the Canadian Association of Pharmacy Students and Interns (CAPSI)

CAPSI is the national, voluntary association of pharmacy students and interns. The Association was developed to promote and advocate the interests of pharmacy students before organized bodies of pharmacy, other professions, government, industry, hospital, and the community. CAPSI provides its members with opportunities for professional advancement through educational programs such as symposia and competitions. Annually, CAPSI holds a conference, Professional Development Week, to allow pharmacy students from across Canada to meet and interact as well as learn from innovative speakers. CAPSI also produces a journal, the CAPSIL, which is published three times yearly and is a venue for pharmacy students to share thoughts on practice and a variety of other issue issues.